

Chocolate Soldiers

The Shepherd's Mantle-Part 5

Titus 1:8-9

I was sent a devotional book recently, written by a Chinese evangelist and missionary leader. This leader is responsible for serving behind the scenes in a movement called, "Back to Jerusalem" where Chinese believers are risking their lives to take the gospel to Muslims and Hindus as they go to countries where the gospel is forbidden.

This particular leader has been imprisoned several times, often hunted with a reward on his head; many times beaten and even tortured for his insistence on preaching the gospel. At one point in a Chinese prison, both his legs were broken and he wrote in his devotional comments of how he would lie on his back and prop his legs up on his cell wall to try and ease the pain.

He writes of struggling to surrender to the will of God there in the solitude of his suffering.

He included in one section how the church in China teaches five things that every disciple needs to be ready to do at any time:

- to pray, regardless of circumstance;
- to be ready to [speak] the gospel;
- to be ready to suffer for the name of Christ;
- to be ready to die for Jesus Christ;
- and they must be ready to escape if they can so that they can continue preaching the gospel.

They apply that last directive – to escape – from Matthew 10 where the early disciples were instructed that if they were persecuted in one place, they should flee to another.

They have to be ready to pray, speak, suffer, escape or die.ⁱ

This Chinese leader entitled the 19th chapter in his devotional, "Chocolate Soldiers."

That caught my eye.

What further caught my attention was that he began the chapter by quoting C.T. Studd, the rather fearless 19th century British missionary who pioneered the gospel in China as well as in India and Africa, enduring great hardships in ministry.

To give you a little idea of the kind of missionary C.T. Studd was, he once wrote a little 2 line poem that simply said, "Some want to live within the sound of Church or Chapel bell; I want to run a Rescue Shop within a yard of hell."

That says it all.

Well, in chapter 19 of this Chinese missionary's devotional he quotes C.T. Studd who delivers a similar challenge; and I quote, "A chocolate Christian dissolves in water and melts at the smell of fire. Living their lives in a glass dish or in a cardboard box, each clad in his soft clothing, a little frilled white paper to preserve his dear little constitution . . . God never was a chocolate manufacturer and never will be."ⁱⁱ

In other words, God is looking for and developing Christians who will not melt or dissolve in the face of peer pressure or opposition or tribulation.

Sounds a lot like Paul the Apostle who challenged Timothy to endure hard times like a good soldier of Jesus Christ (*2 Timothy 2:3*).

Paul further exhorted his son in the faith to train himself for the purpose of growing in godliness (*1 Timothy 4:7*).

God isn't into manufacturing chocolate soldiers.

And in light of our study on the office and calling of the elder, I have little doubt that there are fewer men qualified or even willing to serve as leaders in the church at large today because of greater demands and greater pressure that will be placed on their lives – the requirements of discipline and study – the penalties of leading in front or perhaps even standing alone.

To use the analogy of these missionary pioneers, chocolate soldiers cannot wear the mantle of a shepherd.

There's just too much danger lying in wait; there's too much fire to deal with and you might be tempted to run . . . or even melt down under the pressure of all that heat.

The Apostle Paul gave Titus a task that has been going on in the church since the first century. Find men who will be elders/pastors/bishops – find men who will not melt in the face of fire.

They might look good, but if they're carved out of chocolate they won't be able to lead sheep; they won't be able to guard and feed and encourage and challenge and discipline and love and lead the flock of God over whom they have been appointed.

Titus would naturally have asked, "What kind of resume can you give me to keep me from choosing the wrong shepherds and pointed in the direction of qualified shepherds?"

So Paul gave Titus a list – a list that has stood now for 19 centuries . . . simply outlined as The Qualifications of Elders.

He began with the elders relationship to his wife and children; then Paul delivered to Titus 5 vices his candidates couldn't be known to pattern themselves after – notice *verse 7 of Titus chapter 1; 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.*

Now Paul delivers 7 virtues that these men should pursue and exemplify as a pattern of life – *v. 8. but hospitable, loving what is good, sensible, just, devout, self-controlled, holding fast the faithful word.*

In our last study together, we covered the first 4 virtues.

For our study today, we'll address these final 3 virtues.

And let me remind us all as a church body – all of these qualities are to be the passionate pursuit of every believer. None of us are to be made out of chocolate.

I love chocolate – do I ever love chocolate. We just can't be made out of it.

We are all fighting a battle – and to make matters more difficult, *our struggle isn't against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of darkness and wickedness (Ephesians 6:12).*

And certainly, the church body needs men who will lead the charge and show the way and provide a model in order to lead and protect and encourage the flock in their own daily battles with the world, the flesh and the devil.

Little wonder then that Paul asks Titus to pry into the private lives of these elder candidates.

They must be confirmed as having private disciplines of godliness.

The words in this list that are translated "devout and self-controlled" refer to private exercises – or private disciplines.

The word devout comes from the word *hosios* (ὁσιος) which refers to holy piety.

The word is used by Paul in *I Timothy 2 and verse 8* where he encourages *every man to pray lifting up holy hands* – in other words – hands that are genuinely clean and genuinely holy in private before God and thus they will be the same in public.

Listen, the idea that whatever a man does in private doesn't affect what he does in public is utter nonsense. In fact, it's corrupt and devious nonsense.

According to the Apostle Paul, whatever a man does in private will qualify whatever he hopes to do in public.

And if he can't be trusted in private to care about the will and character and nature of God, he can't be trusted in public to care about any of that either.

One author wrote that when Paul uses this word here for devout, he is referring to an elder/overseer who is fully dedicated to the glory of God.ⁱⁱⁱ

In other words, if he isn't dedicated to the glory of God in his private life where the pressures off – he'll never live up to pursuing the glory of God when the pressure's on.

When the heats turned up, he might melt.

He must be personally devoted to God – and that quality of devotion will be evident both privately and publically.

Paul goes on to add one more virtue in *verse 8* – the word translated, *self-controlled*.

It's a compound word made up of the words, "in" and "power". In other words, it describes a person who is in control of – in power over – and in this case here – one's self.^{iv}

-To be in control of one's own impulses and emotions and actions.

Oh how I dreaded report card time when I was in elementary school especially because the report card format changed once I got into middle school.

In elementary school the report card was divided in half – on one side were subjects like spelling and math and reading and on the other side of the page were character qualities like courtesy and helpfulness and self-control.

I always scored well on spelling and reading but rather poorly in math. But those grades didn't mean a hill of beans to my parents. They were more interested in that other section. Their priorities were all messed up.

So often, those words marked "self-control" got a bad grade and then there were lots of blank lines where the teachers were allowed to tattle and gossip.

A mark of immaturity is the lack of self-control. And every child has to grow up in that regard – and some children grow faster than others.

Your child wants to run and jump when he feels the urge – and you've gotta teach him to sit still. He wants to eat and you've gotta tell him to wait; he really wants dessert and you have to tell him to curb that desire until he's eaten those vegetables. Oh, was there anything more agonizing.

I loved that kid's response when his class was asked one day by their teacher what they had learned recently. One kid raised his hand and said, "I've learned that you can't hide broccoli in a glass of milk." He evidently tried . . . poor kid!

A mark of maturity is controlling urges – emotions – choosing the right act or response even if it's hard and it doesn't taste good or it's unpopular or it's painful or it's time consuming or it's unrewarding . . . you get the point.

Titus – if you want to know what kind of shepherd isn't gonna melt – make sure he's controlling his inner desires – in private, by the way – which will show up as control over himself in public.

One author wrote perceptive words, "An [elder] who does not continually monitor his own life, submitting his sin to the Lord's cleansing and keeping a clear conscience, is not fit to lead God's people, no matter how outwardly righteous his life may appear to be. If he acts right only when others are looking, he is doing just that – acting."^v

And the Pharisees had it down. They gave their money, they fasted and they prayed in public – Jesus said – to be seen by men. To be seen – the Greek word *thainomai* (θαίνομαι) – which gives us our word – theatre.

In other words, they were spiritual only because they wanted to put on a show. And they were good at it.

But when the pressure was on – spiritual leaders of Israel caved in to peer pressure and greed and jealousy – and all those inner urges which were corrupt ran free and they ultimately led the chant and the charge to crucify the Messiah.

Now keep in mind that this virtue of self-control is among the fruit of the Spirit in *Galatians 5:23*.

Paul isn't telling Titus to find men who are some moral and emotional captains of their own ship – some amazing sort of man that has some unusual ability to control his mouth and his heart and his mind and his hands.^{vi}

And it just comes easy to him.

No, self-control is actually the result of being under the Spirit's control – it's a fruit of the Spirit. And self-control, along with every virtue, is a daily decision and a daily battle and a daily discipline.

Elders are men who must then be, as a pattern, under the controlling influence of the Holy Spirit.

So these are the private exercises which become public patterns – devout and self-controlled.

Now Paul moves to the last and most developed of all the virtues.

He moves from private exercises to public exposition.

In fact, you could say that Paul shifts from what an elder *is*, to what an elder *does*.

Notice *verse 9. Hold fast the faithful word, which is in accordance with the teaching.*

In other words, a true shepherd isn't going to let go of the faithful word – the word that is trustworthy.

He's going to revere it and read it and study it and memorize it and obey it and believe it and teach it . . . he's literally gonna love the faithful word of God.

And he's going to set the example for the flock in relation to it:

- in being constantly nourished on the words of the faith and of sound doctrine (*1 Timothy 4:6*);
- in longing for the pure milk of the word (*1 Peter 2:2*);
- in being commended to the word of God's grace, which is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified (*Acts 20:32*).

A pastor/elder preaches and teaches the word of God because he is fully convinced that the Bible is alive and capable of bringing about the reformation of soul and heart and character. He clings to that like he clings to the word.

He's committed to the truth that the word alone reveals the character of God, the will and purpose of God, the promises of God; the plan of redemption from God; the dangers of the enemies of God and the way to walk with God and serve God and commune with God and confess before God and love God.

Paul wrote that *all scripture is given by inspiration and is profitable for teaching and for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness so that – so that! – the man of God may be equipped for every good work (2 Timothy 3:16-17).*

So the pastor/elder who recognizes that Scripture alone is inerrant – it is the breath of God – inspired – literally – God breathed – he then recognizes that scripture is the only sufficient authority for faith and life and practice and then he fully understands why Paul would tell Timothy to *preach the word. (2 Timothy 4:2); to fully carry out the preaching of the word of God (Colossians 1:25) to the flock of God.*^{vii}

Anything less is inadequate. Anything else is parched ground and not green pastures.

A firm grip on the word of God allows an elder to get his arms around the work of God.^{viii}

If the word slips, the work will slip. If the elder strays from the word he will eventually stray from the true work of Christ; if he isn't all that interested in the word of God, his work for God will in reality be nothing more than an appendage of his own fascinations and his own desires and his own reflection.

The church will simply join a host of others, these days, in their quest for relevancy which does nothing more than make their ministry superficial and self-focused – where the highest goal in a worship service is the enjoyment of the spectator rather than the pleasure of God; where the focus is on the fulfilled life of the listener rather than the transformed life of the listener into the holy image of Christ and the glorious character of God.

Apart from the clear commitment and exposition of scripture, the church becomes driven by the winds of trends and fads and entertainment and storytelling which John Piper in his book, *The Supremacy of God in Preaching*, describes simply as the slapstick of evangelical worship.^{ix}

It's quite possible that the evangelical church at large is now set up to melt down at the first signs of genuine persecution.

Now I want you to notice that Paul said the elder must cling to the trustworthy word which is – note this – *in accordance with the teaching.*

In other words, it tracks back to and is in agreement with the apostolic doctrine. To this teaching of the Apostles the New Testament church was formed and committed (*Acts 2:42*).

Any teaching that didn't correspond with developing, inspired record of apostolic truth and preaching and doctrine was considered spurious and dangerous and even devilish (*Galatians 1:8-9*).

There is only one apostolic doctrinal body of truth – you have it in your lap. There is only one Lord – one baptism – one church – one faith – one Spirit – one hope – one God (*Ephesians 4:4-5*)

Anything apart from this God breathed word is simply wrong.

Are you ready for that kind of stand . . . are you ready for that kind of heat?

There are not many gods – there is only one true and living God. There are not many faiths – there is only one true and genuine faith.

And every other belief is deadly and eternally wrong.

Listen, if one group of people believed that 2 + 2 equaled 4 and another group of people believed that 2 + 2 equaled 5, none of us would say, “Isn’t that nice – we have two answers. We have two different viewpoints. And what matters most is what it means to them.

My algebra teacher never gave me that kind of latitude – it was either right or wrong; and she didn’t care what 2 + 2 meant to me personally – I don’t think she even cared about me personally – she certainly didn’t give any points for getting close.

Are you willing to communicate that kind of conviction out there in a world that is now saturated in pluralism – best expressed in one man’s biography where he said the house of God – if there is one – has many doorways. G.E. Lessing, an 18th century German critic played an instrumental role in popularizing pluralism – the view that there are many ways to God – a view that has now taken root in American thinking. He often used a story he created to promote his viewpoint. A father had a magic ring which he was bound to give to one of his three sons when he died. Not wanting to be accused of favoritism, he made two imitation rings just like his. Each son thought his was the real one and an argument broke out between them as to who was the owner of the genuine ring. The three troubled sons agreed to go to Nathan the Wise and explain what happened. After hearing their tale, Nathan the Wise responded that each of them was to think that his own ring was the true and not try to persuade anyone differently.”^x

That sounds really nice, doesn’t it? And it’s certainly non-confrontational . . . but it isn’t the truth.

At the end of the day, there really was only one ring and the other rings were imitations.

Listen, there is only one gospel and all others are fake rings. To use the analogy, there is no magic in them – that is, there is no supernatural

power cleansing and redemption and hope and heaven to be found by those who are deceived.

Titus, make sure you find men that will cling that kind of apostolic truth in that kind of manner.

Yes, the times will change, but the message won’t. Find men who will refuse to let go of the gospel.

Make sure they’re convinced – because as soon as they take on the mantle of a shepherd, the heat’s gonna get turned up . . . the pressure will be on to soften the edges repentance and discipleship and compromise the exclusive claims of Christ alone, by faith in Him alone.

Anybody made out of chocolate isn’t gonna survive.

In fact, the challenge is even greater than simply believing it. Notice that Paul gives Titus 2 statements about what the elders actually do with the word of God.

The first aspect is positive:

Middle part of verse 9, so that he will be able both to exhort in sound doctrine. . . that’s the positive side of it.

The word exhort carries the idea of urging the listener to respond – to receive and to apply the truth.

This is more than transferring information from the notes in the pulpit to the note takers in the pew.

Exhortation is verdict oriented.

To exhort means to seek by God’s Spirit to influence the heart and the conscience and the will of the listener.^{xi}

The word Paul uses here is from parakaleo (παρακαλεω) which also refers to the Holy Spirit – the parkletos (παρακλητος) – who encourages and convicts and reforms.

A modern equivalent would be a reference to a good coach. A good coach knows what his players need – even though they might disagree.^{xii}

I don’t know about you, but I never heard my soccer coach in high school ever say out on the practice field, “Guys, the real reason we’re out here today is for you to feel really good about yourselves; give the guy next to you a big hug. I want you to be comfortable in your new soccer cleats; so if you want to run some laps, that’ll be just fine with me . . . I mean, I’d like you to be in

shape, but you go ahead to figure out what that's like in your own way and in your own time. I just want you to think happy thoughts about soccer.

Not hardly. My soccer coach used to work for Hitler. He would run us until we collapsed. We prayed for the rapture.

But he also knew just how to encourage us – and motivate us – and stretch us . . . he talked strategy and teamwork and let us know about the teams we were going to go up against.

And after we were dead tired, he'd tell us why it mattered . . . and we already knew why . . . and it paid off.

He was an exhorter.

True biblical exposition is exhortation – it actually joins the truth of the word of God with the Spirit of God in bringing about transformation to the child of God so that truth becomes a way of life.

And would you notice that Paul describes this doctrine as “sound” – it is *sound* doctrine.

The Greek word comes from the word *hugaino* (υγαινω) which gives us our English word, hygiene.

It literally means “healthy”. In past times, doctors referred to someone as ‘sound of wind and limb’ – in other words, they were healthy.^{xiii}

So sound doctrine produces a healthy Christian and doctrinally healthy Christians make up a healthy church.

And behind it all is a commitment to sound biblical exposition.

So, Titus, find men who love the word enough to study it and deliver it so that the body will be sound or healthy.

That's the positive aspect.

The second aspect is negative:

Notice further at the end of verse 9, and to refute those who contradict.

The elder is not only to exhort with sound doctrine, but to refute those who contradict.

His ministry is both constructive and confrontive.

John Calvin the reformer wrote that a pastor needs two voices – one for gathering the sheep and the other for driving away the wolves and thieves.^{xiv}

Paul is going to spend several verses detailing what that kind of confrontation looks like – so we'll deal with it in detail then.

But for now, this word translated “refute” means to literally show people their sins and summon them to repentance.^{xv}

Paul knew that Titus needed men who would be willing to both deliver the truth and expose the error.

We need it today more than ever.

And the heat is turning up, isn't it?

To call something sinful or in error or in need of saving is to be considered unloving or judgmental or even divisive, right.

What right do you have to judge me – to call that a sin?

Listen, calling cyanide, poison, is not being judgmental.

Telling your child that the neighbor's dog will bite him isn't being divisive or unkind to animals.

Telling someone they need to be saved and that they are following a false prophet or false god or false messiah is not being unloving – it is being loving enough to try and warn them of hell and win them for heaven.

Our culture is like an airplane which has flown into thick clouds; you can't see out the window. You might think you're okay but you're actually heading for the side of a mountain; you think you're ascending but you are descending. A tragic ending is just ahead.

Titus, find me men who know how to read the instrument panel – and will stand up and accept both the positive and negative aspects of Bible exposition . . . men who will tell the truth.

I can remember the first rumblings of sadness and anger mixed together as I listened to a false teacher deliver a message to his congregation. When I was a freshman in Bible college, the college used several buildings downtown for classes and dormitories – it had yet to build a campus and consolidate the school. I used to walk to class and I often passed a beautiful church building made of stone – with stained glass windows and a beautiful lawn. I imagine the church seated 100 people or so. The name of the church was generic and it had Universalist Church on the church sign. I knew nothing about its doctrine but I decided to find out. So one Sunday morning – which just so happened to

be Easter Sunday, I slipped into that beautiful stone chapel – slate floor and beautifully hand cut pews with soft cushions. People were well dressed around me and they held programs in their hands. We stood to sing a hymn as the service began – it sounded religious enough, although I'd never heard it before and it said nothing of Christ – certainly nothing about His resurrection. And then a Dr. so and so stood to speak. He had about as much life to him as his sermon – he rambled on and as I sat there I could feel every fiber in my body standing on ready. He was literally giving reasons why Jesus Christ did not rise from the dead. He was still in his grave. The church was more than Christ and it didn't matter if He were dead or alive.

I can still feel what I felt in that pew 35 years ago. Anger at that man made out of chocolate who stood for nothing and had already melted years earlier – and yet I remember feeling great pity for people sitting there who, instead of rejoicing at the resurrection of the Savior, were being led to believe He was not alive – but still dead.

That marked me. Even though at the time I was planning on being a history teacher after college, that event uniquely stirred me up.

And to this day, it has been my great duty and delight to wear the mantle of a shepherd – to both battle the wolves as well as exhort and encourage the flock along a saving path of sound doctrine.

Chuck Swindoll, the Chancellor of Dallas Seminary, has also pastored churches for more than 50 years. He wrote recently some words that I hope will reassure the flock but also impress all who wear the mantle of a shepherd; he wrote in his journal these words; If God is pulling His people toward their [spiritual] destiny, I suppose that makes the spiritual leader his rope. Though the tension gets almost unbearable and sometime I fear my rope is coming unraveled, no one should pity me. While one end drags the church through each difficulty, the other feels the firm, reassuring grip of an ever-faithful God. And, for reasons not even I can explain, there's no place I'd rather be. Maybe that's why this is not a job; this is a calling.

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That's the heart of a true shepherd.

According to Paul's own letter to Titus, Jesus Christ will not be pleased with someone else. The church deserves nothing less.

This is a calling then for men either vocationally or voluntarily to wear the mantle of shepherd . . . men who diligent in the word of God . . . men who are driven by the pleasure of God . . . men who are dedicated to the people of God.

Titus, find me men who will not melt – Titus, go find men who will answer the call.

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i Ibid, p. 203

ii Brother Yun, Living Water (Zondervan, 2008), p. 187

iii John A. Kitchen, The Pastoral Epistles for Pastors (Kress Christian Publications, 2009), p. 497

iv Ibid, p. 497

v John MacArthur, Titus (Moody Press, 1996), p. 42

vi Adapted from Charles Ray, First & Second Timothy, Titus, and Philemon (AMG Publishers, 2007), p.154

vii MacArthur, p. 49

viii Kitchen, p. 499

ix Quoted in MacArthur, p. 47

x John Benton, Straightening out the Self-Centered Church (Evangelical Press, 1997), p. 53

xi Strauch, p. 237

xii Charles R. Swindoll, Swindoll's New Testament Insights: 1 & 2 Timothy, Titus (Zondervan 2010), p. 277

xiii Benton, p. 55

xiv Alexander Strauch, Biblical Eldership (Lewis and Roth Publishers, 1995), p. 236

xv Swindoll, p. 277

xvi Swindoll, p. 281