



It Starts with Godly Leaders (Titus 1:5-9)

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If you ask a non-Christian friend to explain what keeps them from becoming a follower of Jesus, hypocrisy often makes the list. It cuts two ways. First, they don't want to *be around* hypocrites. They can tell stories of professing Christians in their family or at work who said one thing but lived another. Second, they don't want to *become* hypocrites. They know they don't have their act together and feel like darkening the door of a church would force them to pretend otherwise.

When the whole topic of hypocrisy and Christianity comes up, two things need to be said. First, if we're being honest, we're all hypocrites on some level. For Christian and non-Christian alike, there's a gap between the kind of person we say we want to be and what we actually do. If hypocrisy is the charge, we're all guilty. Second, the fact that we all struggle in the gap doesn't mean the battle is irrelevant.

The banner over the only road that leads home to heaven is not, "We're all a hot mess." It's Heb 12:14, "Strive for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord." As the people of God, we lament hypocrisy – within us and around us – and make every effort to walk in a manner worthy of the gospel we confess, to live in a way that's consistent with the truth.

Godliness is a hard fight, but it's a good fight. The best kind of fight. And Paul's letter to Titus is a tremendous help in the battle. Titus is all about recognizing and living out the connection between faith and life, doctrine and practice. If hypocrisy says, "Believe the gospel of grace and don't worry about good works," Titus says, "Here's how the gospel of grace produces a life of good works."

Titus reminds us there is a kind of life that accords with sound doctrine and there is a kind of life that does not. There is a way of living that's consistent with the truth and there is a way of living that's not. The central theme emerges in the very first verse of the letter. "I've spent my entire ministry life," Paul says, "laboring for the knowledge of the truth which accords with godliness." He's not alone because Titus has a similar mission. Starting in v. 5, Paul focuses on the specific work Titus needs to do in the churches on the island of Crete to help new believers grow in godliness.

Christian, the role God has given you in the church today may be different than Titus. I'm not an apostle like Paul and you're not an apostolic delegate like Titus! But the

challenge before us is the same. How can we grow in the knowledge of the truth that accords with godliness? How can we become a people of integrity – not hypocrisy – who are zealous for good works?

Look at v. 5, “This is why I left you in Crete,” Paul says, “so that you might put what remained into order...” How many of you love being organized? Peace floods your soul when your socks are grouped by color and your kitchen sink is immaculate? That’s me, for sure! That’s also not the kind of order Paul’s talking about. He’s not talking about minding your p’s and q’s. He’s talking about our patterns of life, our habits of relationship, a way of living that’s consistent with the gospel.

Friend, Christianity is not a set of beliefs you can walk out any old way you want to. That’s the expressive individualism of our age! In your work, godliness looks like something. If you’re married, godliness looks like something. There is more than a spiritual essence to the Christian life. There is a behavioral order, a visible standard of conduct. Where it’s known and cherished, the gospel will change how you think, what you feel, and what you choose to do. To insist there is an order to the Christian life is not to introduce legalism. It’s about living with spiritual integrity.

The churches in Crete were pretty disordered. Tit 1:12-13, “One of the Cretans, a prophet of their own, said, ‘Cretans are always liars, evil beasts, lazy gluttons.’ This testimony is true.” If you were going to bring biblical order in that kind of environment, what would you do? He doesn’t start by giving the church a list of do’s and don’ts. He starts with the right kind of leaders.

The second command Paul gives Titus in v. 5 is an expression of obedience to the first. “I left you in Crete so that you might “put what remained into order,” first and foremost by appointing “elders in every town.” Then and now, if a church is going to practice the truth that accords with godliness, it starts with the character of her pastors.

Biblical leadership is a precious gift. We need to remember that, especially in a cultural climate where authority is intrinsically suspect. You’re an authority figure? You must be an oppressor. That’s not a biblical perspective. The Bible is delightfully honest about the way sin corrupts every aspect of our lives, authority included. But that doesn’t stop the Lord from appointing leaders and using leaders to accomplish his purposes! That means our fundamental attitude toward leaders as the people of God isn’t suspicion. It’s gratitude.

KingsWay, as our leaders go, so goes our church. It's true in the 21st century and it was true in the 1st century. The churches in Crete were troubled with all sorts of false teaching. Quin's going to preach on that next Sunday. But Paul recognizes that behind every form of false teaching is a false teacher, a man lacking in spiritual integrity. The opposite is also true. A church where sound teaching endures is a church where sound teachers endure, where pastors feeding the flock are men of spiritual integrity.

That explains why Paul's first move isn't to correct false teaching. That would be mere band-aid, a short-term fix. His first move is to ensure qualified pastors are put in place. Correcting the effects of false teachers starts with ordaining faithful teachers. And faithfulness begins not with a pastor's ability to preach an amazing sermon or organize an incredible program. It begins with his personal character. Tit 1:5-9 helps us to answer three questions: (1) What is a pastor? (2) Who is qualified to be a pastor? (3) What is a pastor supposed to do?

1) WHAT IS A PASTOR?

In the New Testament, the titles elder, pastor, and overseer are used interchangeably. You can see as much by comparing v. 5 to v. 7. In v. 5, Paul tells Titus to appoint elders. But in v. 7, he describes the qualifications of an overseer. Why? Because it's the same office. 1 Pe 5:1-2 makes the same point, "I exhort the elders among you, as a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, as well as a partaker in the glory that is going to be revealed: shepherd (or pastor) the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight..."

So when Paul tells Titus, "Appoint elders in every town," he's talking about appointing pastors – men with God-given authority to shepherd the flock of God by leading, feeding, protecting, and caring for the people of God. If "elder" is the office, "pastor" is the job description. An elder isn't a gray-haired board member who keeps the pastor in check. An elder is a pastor with authority to care.

Paul highlights two critical aspects of pastoral leadership in v. 5. **First, notice the word elders is plural, not singular.** Why is the word "elder" almost always plural every time it shows up in the New Testament? Because a plurality of pastors is the assumed context of biblical eldership. A healthy, local church is not built around a charismatic communicator. A healthy, local church is led by a plurality of faithful elders with different personalities, different strengths and weaknesses, who work as a team to pastor God's people.



Second, notice Paul instructs Titus to appoint elders “in every town.” He’s highlighting the local character of biblical church leadership. In America, we tend to think bigger is better. If a church has multiple services in multiple campuses all over metro Richmond, that’s a win. All you have to do is find a really gifted pastor, hire a skilled AV team, and you can livestream his teaching all over the place! He may not know your name, but at least he’s an engaging speaker!

That’s not the biblical pattern, brothers and sisters. Paul didn’t tell Titus to find an exceptionally gifted pastor who could travel around and take care of all the preaching on Crete. He told Titus to appoint a local plurality of elders for every church. The scope of their ministry? Small. The reach of their reputation? Limited.

And yet they are the ones of whom the world is not worthy, men who will be welcomed before the throne of God with, “Well done, good and faithful servant.” Team ministry matters. Local pastors who know and are known by local churches matters. What’s a pastor? An elder with authority to care for the people of God.

2) WHO IS QUALIFIED TO BE A PASTOR?

Before we dive into vv. 6-8, let’s pause and answer a critical question. If you’re not a pastor and don’t plan on becoming a pastor, why should you care about any of this? I’ll give you three reasons.

First, so you can recognize a healthy local church when you see one! A couple weeks ago, I had a conversation with a visiting family looking for a church. One person in the family had this preference. Another person in the family had that preference. Everyone gave me their list. Within a few minutes, I felt a bit like a used car salesman, as if my job was to explain how KingsWay could perfectly satisfy all their preferences. After all, if our church doesn’t meet their needs, style of music and demographic ratios included, they might take their business to one of our competitors.

That’s often how people decide where God wants them to go to church. Does this church meet all my felt needs? – which has nothing to do with God or their true needs as Scripture defines them. But instead of saying, “Why are you shopping for churches like a spiritual consumer?” I said, “What do you think makes a church biblical?” They paused for a moment and then said, “We’ve been to a lot of churches. No one has ever asked us that question before. I don’t know.”

Friends, their challenge is not unique. It is so easy for us to evaluate local churches, our own included, with all sorts of metrics that have little to do with what God says is of



greatest importance and everything to do with what God says is peripheral. So what makes a church biblical? A place where you can make a relational commitment as a covenant member and stay for the long haul, whether church life is easy or hard?

If you don't know how to answer that question, pick up a copy of Mark Dever's "Nine Marks of a Healthy Church" in the book shop! But I'll mention one of them right now because Paul does in vv. 6-8. A biblical church is led by a plurality of qualified elders. You need to know what a qualified elder looks like so you can recognize a biblical church when you see one!

Second, you should care deeply about who is qualified to be a pastor because it will profoundly shape what you expect from your pastor. Is a man qualified to be a pastor because he has a massive relational capacity, is everyone's best friend, never forgets your birthday, visits each member in the hospital, is always available by phone, has a solution for all your life problems, a fun personality, and went to a top-notch seminary? No! None of those things make the biblical list of qualifications for ministry, but they often make our personal lists and that's really dangerous.

If who you want your pastor to be isn't aligned with who God wants him to be, one of two bad things will happen. Either the pastor will give into the fear of man and start doing whatever he has to do to keep you happy. Or you will bounce from church to church forever dissatisfied with leadership. What's God heart for us, KingsWay? That we would read the list of qualifications for pastors in vv. 6-8 and our hearts would cry out, "Yes! That is who I want my pastor to be more than anything else!"

I don't want him, fundamentally, to meet my felt needs. I want the example of his life and the content of his teaching to point me to Jesus. I want a visibly godly man more than I want an exceptionally gifted man because I know in the long run that it's the example of his godliness, not the level of his giftedness, that determines whether the Lord will use him to help me become more like Jesus.

Third, you should care deeply about vv. 6-8 because the essential qualifications Paul lays out here for elders define spiritual maturity for every man in the church. Brothers, this is more than a list of requirements for me. This is a call to arms for all of us! This is the kind of man God is calling you to be. I love the fact that Paul starts the list in v. 6 with "if anyone." By the power of the Spirit, the benchmark isn't unattainable, unreachable, or reserved for the rare specimen who rises above the level of mere mortals. No godly man should count himself out from being called by God to shepherd the flock of God.

V. 6 establishes three areas of evaluation. **First, consider a man's personal character.** Is he "above reproach"? Is his reputation in the church one of spiritual integrity? Thabiti Anyabwile's writes, "Being above reproach means that an elder is to be the kind of man whom no one suspects of wrongdoing and immorality. People would be shocked to hear this kind of man charged with such acts. Being above reproach does not mean that he maintains sinless perfection. It means that his demeanor and behavior over time have garnered respect and admiration from others. He lives a life worthy of the calling of God."

Second, consider a man's marriage. Is he a "husband of one wife"? Paul doesn't mean single men or anyone who's been divorced is disqualified. A more literal translation is helpful. Is he "a man of one woman"? If he's married, is his marriage marked by sexual purity, fidelity, and covenant loyalty? A man who cannot care for his own bride is not ready to care for the bride of Christ.

Third, consider a man's family. If a man has children, the character of the family says a lot about the caliber of the father. Are his children (v. 6) "believers and not open to the charge of debauchery or insubordination"? I believe "his children are faithful" is a better translation of the underlying Greek word for several reasons. No parent is able to make their children come to faith in Christ, elders included. Furthermore, if they are believers, why would Paul add that they must also not be known for debauchery or insubordination? You can't be a genuine believer and also be characterized by debauchery and insubordination.

So what do "faithful" children look like? Faithful children are submissive, at least at a behavioral level, to their father's authority. In other words, his kids should not have a reputation for being wild and out of control. As Paul says in 1 Tim 3:4-5, "He must manage his own household well, with all dignity keeping his children submissive, for if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how will he care for God's church?"

We evaluate a man's personal character, marriage, and family. But what exactly does being "above reproach" require? That could mean a lot of different things to a lot of different people. Paul defines "above reproach" by giving us a list of behaviors that must be put off in v. 7 and behaviors that must be put on in v. 8.

And the Lord reminds us at the beginning of v. 7 why being above reproach is so important! An overseer isn't managing a corporation. He is "God's steward," entrusted with caring for the household of God for the glory and praise of God. Pastoral ministry

isn't an exercise in self-fulfillment. It's a responsibility to uphold and protect Christ's treasured possession, his blood-bought bride.

The list of put-off's and put-on's here is worthy of careful study. For time's sake, I'll move through them quickly. But for each one, I'll mention a passage of Scripture that explains how that specific fruit of godliness is connected to the gospel. For make no mistake, only the power of Christ and him crucified can bring these virtues to pass in anyone's life!

Let's start with the put-off's in v. 7. **He must "not be arrogant."** He's not impressed with himself or chasing his own glory. He's a man captivated by the glory of God. And he's a humble man because he knows there's no explanation for who he is and what he's accomplished other than the mercy of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. In other words, he's not arrogant because **he believes the gospel!**

1 Cor 1:30–31, "And because of him you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption, so that, as it is written, 'Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord.'"

He must not be "quick-tempered." A qualified elder is patient under duress, not easily provoked, and capable of being sinned against without retaliating in kind. He's like the Lord in being slow to anger. It's not a personality thing. **He believes the gospel.**

2 Pet 3:9, 13, "The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance...According to his promise we are waiting for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells."

He must not be "a drunkard." That means more than knowing how to hold your wine. It means he must not be enslaved to even lawful pleasures. He's a man under the persistent influence of the Holy Spirit, not some other substance. And he handles areas of Christian freedom with care, more concerned with how his actions will impact others than enjoying his own rights. It's not just because he's strait-laced. **He believes the gospel.**

Ps 4:6–7, "There are many who say, 'Who will show us some good? Lift up the light of your face upon us, O LORD!' You have put more joy in my heart than they have when their grain and wine abound."

He must not be “violent.” He follows a Savior who came to bring peace and contends for peace in every situation. A persistent gentleness, even toward difficult people, characterizes his words and deeds. When others hurt him, he doesn’t develop grudges or become bitter. He is quick to forgive and refuses to repay evil with evil. He doesn’t subjugate the flock. He serves the flock. Why? **Because he believes the gospel.**

1 Pe 3:13–15, “Now who is there to harm you if you are zealous for what is good? But even if you should suffer for righteousness’ sake, you will be blessed. Have no fear of them, nor be troubled, but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy...”

He is not “greedy for gain.” David Mathis, “The pastor who drips love of money, subtle as it may be, tells his church and the world that having God is not enough. Added to that, those who love money, Jesus says, do not truly love God. Rather, we need leaders who show the church and the world that God, not money, is our refuge and hope and safety and comfort and peace.”

A qualified elder should have a reputation for generosity with his possessions and freely lay down his time and energy to serve others. Unselfishness marks his relationship to the stuff of this world **because he believes the gospel.** Matt 13:44, “The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and covered up. Then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field.”

How about the put-on’s in v. 8? **A qualified elder must be “hospitable.”** The way we welcome people into our homes is a litmus test for sacrificial love. An overseer delights in using his home to bless others. And it’s not because he’s married to Martha Stewart. **It’s because he believes the gospel.** Rom 15:7, “Therefore welcome one another as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God.”

He must also be “a lover of good.” His affections are directed toward what God says is good, true, and beautiful. He delights in doing good to all men, especially the household of faith. It’s not about being a passionate extrovert. **He believes the gospel!**

Ps 63:5–7, “My soul will be satisfied as with fat and rich food, and my mouth will praise you with joyful lips, when I remember you upon my bed, and meditate on you in the watches of the night; for you have been my help, and in the shadow of your wings I will sing for joy.”

Why is he self-controlled? **Because he believes the gospel.** “Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires” (Gal 5:14). Why is he upright? **Because he believes the gospel.** “No one born of God makes a practice of

sinning, for God's seed abides in him; and he cannot keep on sinning, because he has been born of God" (1 Jn 3:9). Why is he holy and disciplined? **Because he believes the gospel!** "[Christ] gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works" (Tit 2:14).

The kind of man who is "above reproach," who embodies the put-off's in v. 7 and the put-on's in v. 8 isn't just a nice guy. He's a man who believes the Word of the gospel and embodies the implications of the gospel. He's a living example of "the truth that accords with godliness." Or as Paul summarizes at the beginning of v. 9, he's a man who holds firm to "the trustworthy word as taught."

What's the true test of whether you are holding firm to the Word of the gospel, to the truth about Jesus and all he's done to accomplish salvation for mankind, is not what you claim to believe. It's the present character of your life. Does your life display the fruits of the gospel? That's the test. That's what it means to hold fast to the "trustworthy word." That's the kind of man who is qualified to be a pastor.

3) WHAT IS A PASTOR SUPPOSED TO DO?

In the second half of v. 9, Paul connects the character of a pastor's life to the content of his teaching. What hypocrisy separates, integrity unites. The reason he must be "above" reproach, holding fast to the word of life, is "so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict it."

The responsibility to "give instruction in sound doctrine" starts with the testimony of a pastor's life in vv. 6-8! But the command is not a "preach the gospel and if necessary use words" sort of thing. A faithful elder uses his mouth to declare the truth of the gospel and the kind of life that is consistent with the gospel. He does it through private conversations. He does it in public preaching. Instructing the church in sound doctrine is the primary work God has called us to do as your pastors.

There may be all sorts of things you would like us to do. And I have no doubt most of them are really good! But please remember what God says we are primarily called to do. **We are charged to give you formative and corrective instruction in sound doctrine** – to take God's Word in one hand, your life in the other hand, and say with the gentleness of a mother and the authority of a father, "Do you see how the gospel requires and empowers you to live this way, not that way?"



There is no pastoral vision in the New Testament for men who say a bunch of nice-sounding spiritual things from the pulpit and then let the people of God do whatever seems good in their own eyes the rest of the week. Giving instruction (and when necessary correction) in sound doctrine means calling you, as the people of God, to walk in a manner worthy of God. That's not heavy-handed. That's biblical leadership. That's faithful pastoring. That's what a pastor is supposed to do.

CONCLUSION

And to that end, I would be remiss if I did conclude by honoring the men who labor alongside of me in pastoral ministry in this church. Chris, Josh, Caleb, Quin, you guys are faithful shepherds! Thank you for being men of character. Thank you for honoring God in your marriages. Thank you for honoring God in your parenting. More than anything, thank you for being **men who believe the gospel**, and for showing me and our entire church through the example of your life what it means to walk in a manner worthy of the gospel.

I know you'll give me grief later for doing this, but I want you to stand right now, wherever you are in this room – not so we can make much of you, but so we can thank God for you, for God's work in our lives through you, because the Lord is using you to help all of us hold fast to the Word of life.

Lord, we don't want to be a people who live a way that is contrary to sound doctrine. We want to live in a way that is consistent with sound doctrine. We want to be a people who are above reproach. We don't want to be arrogant, quick-tempered, a drunkard, violent, or greedy for gain, but a lover of good, self-controlled, upright, holy, and disciplined. We want to hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught. We want to believe the gospel. And we want to live the gospel.

You've given that stewardship in a primary way to us as pastors. To that end, we pray right now for the present and future pastors in our church...