

Leaders who exemplify good

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 05 November 2023

Preacher: Brian King

- [0 : 00] Let's pray and then let's get into Titus chapter 1. Father, thank you again that you are a God who is not silent. You speak to us and so speak to us this morning by your spirit.
- I pray that as we take in the words of Titus chapter 1, we would be inspired and ready, Lord, to do your will. So speak to us this morning. We pray all this in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.
- Last week, we saw what the good life is. For followers of Jesus, it is a life devoted to doing good. And so the goal of every church, in a sense, is to be forming people who are eager for good.
- That's why it's the title of our sermon series. But if you are poor, how are you going to do that? What's your strategy? What's your very first step?
- Now, if it were me, I'd probably be thinking in terms of structures and programs, how should we run our small groups, what kind of training will help equip people to do this, what kind of processes do we need to promote and produce growth.
- [1 : 08] And it is not wrong, necessarily, to be thinking this way. Systems do need to be put into place to help people make progress and ensure some form of accountability.
- Otherwise, things will fall into disorder. And Paul isn't against orderliness. After all, why has Paul left Titus in Crete?
- Verse 5 tells us, The reason I left you in Crete was that you might put in order what was left unfinished. In other words, things are not in order and Titus has to go sort it out.
- So, obviously, Paul doesn't want this order either. Now, what exactly was not in order at Crete? Let me clue you in.
- Last week, I mentioned it looks like Paul and Titus have been on a mission trip to this island and they have been pretty successful. Thanks to their efforts, there are now a few new churches around the place.
- [2 : 15] But it seems as if they are all still pretty young in the faith. They haven't yet, it seems, raised any actual leaders. And they were growing wary in doing good.
- So, on many fronts, things were quite messy. Meanwhile, elsewhere in Titus, we discover that there are also bad people about. In verse 10, they are described as rebellious and full of meaningless talk and deception.
- And if these people are not stopped, they will destroy people's faith. They will turn churches bad. They will stop Christians living the good life.
- So, what is Paul's strategy to combat all this disorder? How will he ensure God's people can keep doing good? Well, unlike me, at this point, he doesn't really talk about programs or small groups or training.
- Instead, he tells Titus, verse 5 again, appoint elders in every town. Appoint elders in every church.
- [3 : 28] And actually, that is not unique to Crete. That's the New Testament pattern. It's interesting to see what Paul and his co-workers almost always do on their missionary journeys.

First of all, they will preach the gospel. And then they will make sure churches are planted. So, often you will find people, Paul and people like Barnabas, doing that in places like Lystra and Iconium and Antioch.

But then notice what they do next. Look at Acts 14, verse 21 to 23, for example. So, how does Paul look to sustain gospel churches and gospel movements?

He makes sure they have elders. That's his primary strategy. Now, of course, it doesn't happen straight away. It takes time to establish godly elders.

But even when he couldn't do it himself, like in the case of Crete, he commissions Titus to do it. So, clearly, Paul thinks elders are really important if that is his overall pattern.

[4 : 59] But perhaps you're thinking to yourself, Really, Paul? Are elders really that significant in helping a church keep doing good? Are finding the right elders really the first strategic step we should take?

Why are they so important? Well, the clue is in who they are and what they do. We know from 1 Peter 5, one of their key roles is to shepherd God's people.

They feed and care and protect. And here in Titus 1, we find two other clues why they are vital. Look at verse 7.

How are elders described in this case? They are overseers. That refers to their function. They watch over something.

They exercise oversight. They set direction. And they lead people in that direction. And they are also described in another way in verse 7.

[6 : 04] In the NIV, it says they manage God's household. More literally, as in the ESV, they are God's stewards. Now that is a term that further illuminates their significance.

In the ancient world, a steward was entrusted with his master's house. He would make sure that things like operations and finances are working as they should.

Perhaps more importantly, stewards operated in line with their master's wishes to ensure that their master's household is in good health.

And elders steward God's household. So, if elders are overseers and stewards, that means where they go will be where the church will go.

What they are like will be how the church is like. What example they set will be what the church will follow. And that's why elders are important.

[7 : 12] They set the example as they follow the Lord's example. They are the pace setters for the entire church. So, that brings us to the very important question.

If that is what elders are for, what should an elder be like? What are the biblical qualifications? Well, Titus 1 verse 5 to 9 is going to show us.

And they tell us that there are two essential criteria. Firstly, they must be people who are transformed by the truth. And secondly, they must be people who are trusted to teach the truth.

And if such people are your elders, then your church will be one ready to do good. So, let us look at each of these in turn. Firstly, they must be people who are transformed by truth.

Elders are those whose lives have been touched by the gospel. They have encountered Jesus. And they have been changed by him. They will look different from those around them.

[8 : 22] For those on Crete, that means someone will look at the description of Cretans in chapter 1 verse 12. Liars, evil brutes, lazy gluttons.

You might remember that from last week. And say, wait a minute. That description doesn't fit the Cretan elders at all. And they will be blameless.

You would notice that that is something Paul emphasizes since he says it twice. In verses 5 and 7. Now, clearly, blameless doesn't mean sinless.

Because if that was the case, no one except Jesus will qualify. So, what are we talking about? One clue is to look at another place where the same term is used.

Just look at Colossians 1 verse 22 with me for a moment. Let me read it. Now, that phrase in the red italics there, free from accusation, is exactly the same term translated blameless in Titus 1.

[9 : 43] And that is the idea. It is to live in such a way that, objectively speaking, you are not open to any charge of moral failure.

As the theologian John Calvin puts it, it is not so much that you are exempt from sin totally, but you are not marked by disgrace.

Or to use the language of Titus 2 verse 8 later, you live such that those who oppose you may be ashamed because they have nothing bad to say about you.

And that is why this is such an important qualification. Because when an elder lives in a way that is consistent with the gospel, he protects the reputation of Jesus.

And an elder must be blameless in two areas in particular. In his family life and before a watching world.

[10 : 45] So first of all, in his family life. In verse 6, he must be faithful to his wife. He is a one-woman man. In the way that he speaks.

In his body language. In the way that he behaves towards others. There is to be no question mark as to whether he is totally committed to his spouse. Now, this doesn't mean that all elders must be married.

It just so happened that during that time, most people got married. And so Paul just assumes he'll be talking to married men. But the stress here is on character rather than on marital status.

Does this person, even if single, show integrity and faithfulness in the way he behaves towards the opposite sex? Does it show that he takes Hebrews 13 verse 4 seriously and honors the marriage bed?

And he must be faithful as a father. His home must be a godly home. Look at verse 6 again. He is a man whose children believe and are not open to the charge of being wild and disobedient.

[12 : 05] Now, in this case, children here refer to dependents. Since we are talking about those who are still in the household. And this immediately raises a question. Is this saying that you are only qualified to be an elder if every single one of your children are believers?

Now, on balance, I don't think so. You see, if you look at the footnote of this verse in the NIV, you would notice that this verse can also be translated, a man whose children are trustworthy.

And indeed, if you look at Titus 3 verse 8 later on, you can see the phrase, this is a trustworthy saying. And the word translated trustworthy there is the same word used in chapter 1 verse 6.

So the footnoted version is a legitimate translation. Then the question is, should we in verse 6 translate it as believing or trustworthy?

Well, look at the context. What is in view here? It is about how someone handles his family, isn't it?

[13 : 20] The question here is not so much about are the children all Christians, but the question here is, is he, this elder, someone who is faithfully managing a household as well as he can?

That's the question. After all, if, verse 7, he is going to be a steward of God's household, then it is worth examining how he manages his own household.

Is there order and discipline? Is he raising children who generally can be trusted and are not, verse 6 again, wild and rebellious?

Now, of course, if he is someone who is fostering a home where Jesus is worshipped, where grace is regularly shown, where the Bible is taught and pleasing God is a priority, then more likely than not, the children will be Christians.

But if someone has three children and every single one of them turns from the faith, that in itself could potentially be a sign that things are not well at home.

[14 : 38] In that case, we should rightly hesitate. If a person shows an inability to lead their children, we should think carefully about giving them significant leadership in the church.

But, if someone has demonstrated godliness in his parenting, but only two of his three children are believers, that in itself is not an automatic disqualification.

And this is reinforced by the fact that there is no such requirement in 1 Timothy 3, which also lays out the qualifications for elders. So, an elder must be blameless in his home life.

Now, that is interesting, isn't it? If someone was interviewing for a senior executive position in the secular world, how you are doing with your wife and kids probably won't come up during the job interview.

But in church, it is an important reference point. But that is not the only area. Second of all, he must be blameless before a watching world.

[15 : 50] In verse 7, Paul now lays out five negatives. Here are five things an elder must not be. Firstly, he must not be overbearing.

The idea here is one of self-centeredness and selfishness. An overbearing person is controlled by his desire to get what he wants at the expense of all else.

But a good elder will not manipulate or leverage his authority in unhealthy ways. He will not crush others just to bring about a certain result.

Then, he must not be quick-tempered. It isn't that he must never be angry. But he must not be someone who gets angry for the wrong reasons.

He mustn't be someone given to an explosive lack of control where anger rises too quickly and he cannot control himself. He must not be given to drunkenness.

[16 : 58] He is not addicted to wine. Elsewhere, in Ephesians 5, verse 18, Paul seems to suggest that people who get drunk often are displaying the opposite of spirit-filled lives.

And that's not what you want in any church leader. then, he must not be violent. He does not seek change with the use of his fists.

And he shouldn't be a bully who belittles and humiliates you, who abuses and isolates you in such a way that you feel confused and cut off.

And he must not be someone pursuing this honest gain. It is one thing to earn your wage, and it is another thing to be living for the paycheck rather than serving the people.

When someone is a lover of money, even if it is not immediately obvious, he is communicating to the church and to the world that God himself is not enough.

[18 : 08] And from these negative traits, Paul then moves on to the six positive ones in verse 8. What should an elder be like? He must be hospitable.

Now, this doesn't mean that he must be brilliant in the kitchen. The word in Greek is phylokenia, which is a compound word meaning lover of strangers.

And so the biblical definition of hospitality is showing love to strangers and guests. After all, in the ancient world, where people often travel long distances on the road, they will need someone to be hospitable at the end of the day to put a roof over their heads in order that they may be protected from the elements of the weather and from robbers.

And so, we're not talking about top quality meals and after-dinner entertainment here. We're talking about seeking to love others by serving them in their area of need.

today, if you see someone taking the initiative and making the effort in church to welcome the visitor and the outsider, if you see someone willing to inconvenience themselves to open their homes to those in need, that is the hospitable person.

[19 : 34] That is your potential elder. love what is good. In a letter that is so concerned with goodness, that's not surprising, is it?

It is always on his mind to show what is good and to do what is good. He would love what God loves. And so, not surprisingly, Paul envisions that such a person will be upright, holy, and disciplined.

They have godly qualities, which as we said last week, are God-like qualities. And they will do, strive to do what is right consistently.

And he will be self-controlled. I've gone slightly out of order and put this last because I wonder if many of the things mentioned in verses 7 and 8 ultimately have to do with self-control.

After all, if you're not quick-tempered, not addicted to wine, not violent, and not chasing gain, you are basically being self-controlled. And that is important for someone in leadership to demonstrate.

[20 : 51] You see, when we become Christians, we still feel urges, even strong ones, to do things that are not good. we still feel emotions like anger and desire, which, when improperly directed, could very well lead us to destructive behaviour.

But those who are self-controlled are able to direct our actions to not do what is bad, but to do what is good. It is for that reason a fruit of the Spirit.

And it is certainly a big concern for Titus. You will notice when we get to chapter 2, that self-control pops up again and again.

And it is necessary for the elder. As the 19th century commentator Matthew Henry once warned, how unfit are those to govern a church who cannot govern themselves.

So, Titus 1 verse 5 to 8 tells us elders are to be those who are transformed by the truth of the gospel.

[22 : 05] But, why is this the criteria? Let's think about that for a moment. When you consider all these qualities mentioned in verses 6 to 8, what have you noticed?

I hope you've picked it up already. I hope you are thinking, wait a minute, isn't this simply the picture of every Christian?

Surely, all the qualities mentioned are ones that every Christian is meant to have, not just leaders. Surely, our Lord wants all his followers to be self-controlled, upright, holy, and disciplined.

Surely, it is right for every Christian to seek to be hospitable, to love good, to not be overbearing and quick-tempered, and so on. And you are right.

So, why are elders especially singled out here? Well, there is one simple reason. Because they exemplify the good.

[23 : 17] good, they help us understand we should do the same. They help us know how to do the same.

They exemplify the good life to us. But more than that, they encourage us. things. Because, as they exemplify the good, they show us the power of the gospel.

As they exemplify the good, they show us the power of the gospel. Think about it. How is it that an elder can be blameless in all these ways?

Is it because they are somehow more super spiritual? Is it because they are somehow more anointed? No.

If an elder displays godliness, he does so for exactly the same reason why you can be godly.

[24 : 29] Because they feed on the truth that leads to godliness. Because the grace of God is at work in their lives to produce godliness.

And so when elders lead blameless lives, they actually give you gospel hope. Because when they say to the church, my friends, hang on to the gospel.

The gospel can save you and free you from slavery to whatever sin has you hooked today. When they say that to you, you can look at their lives and you say, I believe you.

And that is why God wants elders who are transformed by the truth. So that when you look at them, you can say, wow, the gospel has changed these men.

And I desperately want that same godliness producing gospel too. I want to change and by God's grace I can see change is possible.

[25 : 29] I can have hope and you will pursue what can truly transform you, the gospel itself. Because you see the evidence and that is what God wants.

Or think about it from the opposite angle. Imagine if the elders didn't have such character. They might be very skillful in many ways. They are eloquent speakers.

strategic planners. They are charismatic personalities. So they are very capable leaders able to achieve their aims. But if their aims are ungodly or achieved in an ungodly way, what happens?

Their church might look very successful for a while. They are big numerically. They are praised regularly. They are influential nationally. But in the end, they will not be a force for good.

Because the godliness producing gospel is not at its heart. People won't come out of those churches living good lives. And should these leaders be so ungodly that their church eventually collapses, as sadly has happened a few times over the past few years, then you would say, hmm, I guess this gospel stuff is pretty rubbish after all.

[26 : 56] It doesn't bring any good. Well, that would be tragic, wouldn't it? And that is why elders must be people who are transformed by truth.

But there is one other criteria. Secondly, there must also be people who are trusted to teach the truth. Look at verse 9. God must hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been taught so that he can encourage others by sound doctrine and refute those who oppose him.

Again, think about it. Elders must exemplify the good, but good examples on their own cannot transform people from the inside out.

For that to happen, people need the gospel. And so that is why elders must be committed to teaching sound doctrine. They must be committed to communicating the gospel in all of its rich dimensions all the time.

They must talk about how the cross humbles us because it reveals the depths of our sin that such a heavy price needed to be paid, but also how the cross gives us joy because it reveals the depths of God's love that he would pay the price.

[28 : 20] And as they speak about all these things and more besides, they encourage us. Did you notice that is how we are encouraged in verse 9?

It is not by inspirational words or music. It is by sound doctrine. But to do so over years and years requires determination resilience.

It is hard work. After all, when you don't see immediate results of changed lives, it is tempting to change the message. Or when people smirk at you because you're so silly to think that good theology can lead to the good life, it is tempting to believe them and adopt a less gospel-focused strategy.

And that is why we need people who will hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been taught. For if we compromise here, God's house will eventually fall back into disorder.

And an elder must not just instruct but rebuke. He must refute those who oppose sound doctrine. Now, it is actually one of his essential tasks. It is in the job description.

[29 : 33] Because again, remember the consequences. What is such teaching is left unchecked. That means people will not be receiving the godliness producing gospel.

They will not experience its transformative power and God cannot allow that. Now, if the elder is an overbearing, quick-tempered person, then that rebuke, of course, could easily become something worse.

But what if it is a Titus 1 verse 7 to 8 elder who is doing the refuting? That can only be a good thing.

So just imagine if Titus were to go around appointing elders who have been transformed by truth and can be trusted to teach the truth. And these are the men who will oversee and steward God's people.

Can you see now how that can only help the church become devoted in doing good? good? And that is what we all need to hear.

[30 : 40] You see, have you ever thought, why did Paul bother writing Titus 1 verse 5 to 9? Notice in verse 5, he says to Titus, appoint elders in every town as I directed you.

In other words, this is not a new command that he's giving. It's very likely that he's already told Titus all this before, so why bother using precious space on the scroll to repeat himself again?

Well, maybe it's because Titus is forgetful, yes, but actually that is probably an even more fundamental reason. If you look at the very last verse of this letter, 3 verse 15, what does Paul say there?

He says, everyone with us, or with me, sends you. greetings. And the you there in 3 verse 15 is in the plural.

In other words, as Paul writes this letter to Titus, he is expecting the church to listen in. And he writes Titus 1 verse 5 to 9 precisely because he thinks this is not just for Titus to know, but for every church member to know.

[31 : 59] And so as we end, as church members today, even if we are not in leadership positions in church, what can we take away from these verses?

Let me draw out three implications. Implication number one, if these are what elders should be like, this should impact who we listen to and how we do church.

This should impact who we listen to and how we do church. You see, today there are so many people whom you can listen to online. You could listen to me this morning and then by this afternoon listen to three other preachers on YouTube.

But it is good to ask why are we listening to these people. Is it because we like their eloquence? Because their views agree with our own? Because we like how they debate others?

Or is it because they are holding onto the trustworthy message of the gospel as it has been taught? Now that must be one of the primary reasons.

[33 : 06] So it is good to honestly assess why we listen to who we listen to. Now I'm not saying that we can't listen to anyone ever on YouTube.

Certainly I myself am grateful for being able to listen to some very insightful preachers over the years. But here is another thing. How do you know if they are living godly lives?

I know there are a number of you who have been listening online to me but you have never stepped foot into KEC and talked to me and watched me. How do you know I am leading a godly life?

I don't think you can know and that scares me a little. You see it is much better when you guys see me week in week out and not just when I preach. It is better when you see me interact with you in the equipped classes which I've been enjoying or when I've eaten with you and prayed with you.

You can know better if I am being godly or not. And that helps keep me honest. And hopefully if I am being godly that will make more impact because you know that I am trying to live out the truth that I preach.

[34 : 22] And that is exactly the way it should be because god has designed Christians to be in communities of mutual encouragement and mutual accountability. So if you are someone who is doing church exclusively online, can I encourage you to rethink that?

Because otherwise, there is no way for elders like me to fulfill the core to exemplify the good. Implication number two, if these are what elders should be like, that should change our perspective on who we see as prospective leaders.

Now it is tempting, isn't it, to make our assessments just like the world does? We say, oh wow, look at that guy. He's a highly qualified doctor, he's very smooth at networking, he's pretty charming, he comes to church every week and he gives quite a lot, he is a good elder or deacon or small group leader candidate.

But what if in your conversations with him, you find him actually pretty disinterested in theological and spiritual matters? What if he only likes to talk to people just like him?

What if he is someone who is used to getting his own way, all the time? Is he qualified according to Titus 1? I'm afraid it doesn't seem so.

[35 : 44] But what if he is someone who gives his attention even to those not like him? What if he is gently but firmly speaking God's truth in every situation?

What if he is a patient mediator? then keep an eye on him? This week one of my friends paid tribute to one of the elder pastors at his church on social media.

And let me just paraphrase a little what he wrote. Mark would patiently listen to my incessant monologues while not being afraid of speaking hard truths with a bluntness proportional to the wake of the message.

One way or another, he would remind me again and again about both the sovereignty and goodness of God, often by gently showing me how my actions and thoughts were inconsistent with my beliefs about who God is.

The patience he demonstrated towards me was by no means special. I would see him demonstrating the same posture towards other members of the congregation. In fact, it used to frustrate me that he would be so patient with people I felt didn't deserve it.

[36 : 51] Then there was the composure he would demonstrate when dealing with criticism, especially when dealing with someone with a tongue as sharp as mine. Firm, but always gentle.

I can't remember him ever displaying any visible signs of anger in the face of criticism, whether in private or public. It is also true that while no one ever questioned the faithfulness of his preaching, I remember how some of us would grumble about his delivery, comparing his skill in public speaking to the big name preachers of the day, both locally and internationally, but I see now, I prize giftedness over character, not realizing God's power works best through faithful but unfleshy displays of character and conviction.

Thank God for Mark. And that is exactly what we are looking for. And that brings me to implication number three. If these are what elders are to be like, keep encouraging your elders in godliness and value those qualities.

Occasionally after service, there are one or two of you who want to encourage me and so you come up to me and you say, Pastor, good sermon. And I want to say thank you for your thoughtfulness.

It is appreciated. But here is another thought. What if whenever you see any of your leaders displaying godliness, you let them know, thank you for your gentleness in this situation.

[38 : 31] Thank you for wanting to do good in that situation. If God values godliness and not just good preaching in his leaders, then let's encourage that.

Today I am quite certain that every elder, including myself, got a little anxious listening to today's sermon. Because I am certain that every one of us knows that we all can still make progress in all these areas.

But if we all express our appreciation and not just to our leaders, but to each other, every time we saw someone, any Christian, displaying godliness or quietly doing good work, wouldn't that spur all of us, whether elder or not, to live changed lives and be eager for good.

And we show we value these things when we not only encourage our leaders whenever we see them being godly, but when we want to imitate them as they follow Christ as well.

Nothing encourages any leader more than to realize that as they exemplify the good, they are encouraging and impacting others to want to do the same. And what a way to together point to the goodness of our Lord Jesus.

[39 : 51] So today, let's pray for good elders and good leaders, present and future, those who are Titus 1, verse 5 to 9 people, so that we may become a Titus 2, verse 14 people eager to do good.

Let's do that now. Father, we thank you for your word, and we know that it is a very challenging word in many, many respects. But Father, we thank you Lord that you are a good God, and we just pray right now that you will help all of us in leadership to exemplify all the traits and the qualities that have been mentioned here today.

And we pray that you will continue to raise up more and more leaders from within the congregation and not just in our church, but in every church in Kuching, that they may have similar elders, people who are all these things, so that together every church in Kuching might be a force for good and be able to point to your gospel.

All this we pray in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.