

Church Matters: Studies in Paul's letter to Titus

What Christ requires of Church Leaders

Titus 1:1-9

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If I were to ask you who was your favourite King, Queen, Prime Minister, President or Politician, and more importantly why you chose them, what would you say? Winston Churchill—because he wasn't deceived by Hitler? Mahatma Gandhi—because he lived a life of simplicity and peace? Queen Elizabeth 2—because of her long stable reign? Barack Obama—because he was the first black president? Nelson Mandela—because he was prepared to suffer for a just cause? What, I wonder, do we look for in a leader?

God's Word to us this morning, from Titus chapter 1, is truly revolutionary—if we have ears to hear! Because the qualities Jesus is seeking in church leaders are very different from those the world seeks.

If you have been with us for a few weeks you will know that the apostle Paul is writing to his faithful assistant, let's call him "Pastor Titus", encouraging him to organize the churches on the island of Crete. Paul's had to leave the island before leaders—called elders—had been appointed, so Paul writes this letter to help Titus to choose the right men to care for the new churches dotted all over Crete.

What does the world look for when it seeks to appoint leaders of countries, organisations, companies, or voluntary groups?

Education. Does this person have a degree, a master's degree, a PhD? And if so, from what institution—because there's a snobbish ranking system in the educational world.

Giftedness. Another desirable might be "giftedness" - this person excels at some particular skill, perhaps in making money, or teaching, or leadership.

Status. Do they hold respected, high positions in the world, have they been given some grand title, a Sir or a Dame?

Class. Do they come from the upper classes—or do they belong to the right tribe? Vote them in.

Good-dresser! Dress is very important in the eyes of the world. Do they wear Vans x Mongoose Authentic slippers, or is that watch they are wearing a Tory Burch Eleanor from Bloomingdale's? (When Narendra Modi became PM of India, he had a suit made so the pinstripes read his name, Narendra Damodardas Modi, Narendra Damodardas Modi, etc.)

Personality. A Big Personality! Boris Johnson had personality, but, I hear them they say, Truss and Starmer are bores!

Youthfulness and good looks. In some circumstances youthfulness is preferred over the wisdom of age, especially in a visual age. (I have read that many of the early American presidents would never be voted in today because they did not have *Tom Cruise* looks.)

“Long membership.” Here’s a common quality in voluntary organisations—how long the person has been a member. You can imagine the ruckus in a working man’s club if the new boy on the block is being considered for chairman, over a longstanding “founding member.”

Wealth. People look up to people who are wealthy; numerous world leaders have been appointed on account of their wealth.

Even Novelty. Politicians are sometimes chosen because they will be “the first this” or “the first that” and the party or nation can then boast that their candidate will go down in the history books. Novelty!

Now for the Bible revolution! None of those qualities, not a single one of them, count when it comes to choosing leaders in the church. Jesus is not looking for education, or giftedness, or status, or class, or wealth or personality or novelty! Does that shock us? If it does, it shows how deeply we have been influenced by the world.

The only thing that counts when it comes to leadership in the church is character, character character. What the man *is*, not his gifts, not his background, not his education, not his wealth, not his connections, not his class, not his standing in the world. Character ALONE is what counts. That is the revolutionary teaching Paul puts before us in Titus chapter 1!

No-one should be surprised, of course! Because Jesus is our example. He was not highly educated or wealthy (in fact he came from despised “can anything good come out of” Nazareth [John 1:46]); he did not have “personality” or good looks (in fact Isaiah 53: 2 says “*he had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him.*”). And what did they say of his twelve disciples, Acts 4:13? They were “unschooled ordinary men.”

How should we listen to these verses? (Do I hear someone say, “I’m not an elder, so I don’t need to tune in!”) Well, if you are an elder, think of this sermon as a spiritual leadership MOT. We have godly elders at MPC, but it’s good to be reminded of the standard God holds us to. “Who is sufficient for these things?” (2 Corinthians 2:16), only the grace of God can match us to our high calling. If you are an aspiring elder—and Paul says “if anyone sets his heart on being an elder, he desires a noble task.” (1 Timothy 3:1) - ask yourself, Do I have these character traits? If you are a member of this church—this sermon is a reminder of what we seek in our church leaders—very different from the world. For all of us, elders and congregation, the qualities we discover in Titus 1 are for us all to aspire to, for they summarise a Christ-like character. As we hear the qualities Jesus requires of church leaders, let everyone pray “Lord make me more like that, make me more like Jesus.”

“Titus, when you are choosing church leaders on the island of Crete, don’t choose men because they are popular, good-dressers, wealthy, or educated, choose men who bear these qualities, Titus 1: 6-9.”

The overarching qualification is repeated in verse 6 and 7, is “Blameless.” Blameless cannot mean perfect, because if it did, no man could be an elder! Elders are sinners just like everyone else. No, blameless is the summary quality that is then fleshed out in ten different ways in the verses that follow. A man or woman who has the title “Physicist” must be good at many different skills, he must be good at maths, have a great understanding of the way everyday objects move and accelerate, a grasp of the invisible sub-atomic world, appreciation of how large masses in the universe behave, and so on. “Physicist” is the overarching name for a host of other lesser qualities. In the same way, the word “Blameless” is the umbrella title which covers a host of five other qualities.

#1 Jesus expects a high standard of family life

It starts in the family, verse 6. Jesus expects elders to be faithful to their wives, that’s what “husband of but one wife” means. It does not mean he has to be married, because Jesus was not married, and the apostle Paul was most probably not married either. It means that whether he is married or single, he must be sexually pure: if he is married he must be a “one-woman man” and if he is single he must celibate and pure. In an age where many women dress immodestly and in an age where pornography is omnipresent, an elder—no, every Christian!—must by constant vigilance avoid sexual temptation and sin. *“Flee the evil desires of youth..” (2 Timothy 2:22) “Let us behave decently, as in the daytime, not in carousing and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and debauchery...” (Romans 13:13)*

Continuing the domestic theme, Paul talks about an elder’s children, read verse 6b. Paul is referring to dependent young children, not grown up ones. (When children come of age, they may choose to reject the Gospel, or wander into the far country. But while they are young and dependant upon us, they must both believe and behave.)

Kids just naturally follow their parents, so if a man’s children do not believe in Jesus there must be something seriously amiss with life in the home. What is wrong about the home life which is causing the child to turn away from Jesus? And since an elder is going to have to manage church affairs, his own children must be well behaved. “If anyone does not know how to manage his own family, how can he take care of God's church?” (1 Timothy 3:5)

#2 Jesus expects a godly attitude to alcohol and money

No drunkenness

Verse 7, I’m gathering all the qualities into five groups, “not given to drunkenness.” The word here is *parainos*, “beside wine.” “Whenever I see Simon, he’s always got a glass of wine or a beer in his hand.” There must be no hint of alcohol abuse in the life of an elder—or in the life of any Christian for that matter. *“Do not be drunk with wine which leads to excess, but be filled with the Spirit.” (Ephesians 5:18)*

And a Christian elder must not be money-mad either. “Not pursuing dishonest gain,” verse 7. All his financial dealings must be in order and above board, not a dodgy ledger in sight! If a man engages in dodgy deals, you

see, it reveals a secret love of money: he's not happy with the money he has, he wants more and is prepared to beg, borrow or steal to get it. There are lots of televangelists out there who love money. They tell you that if you sow 100 dollars into their ministry, God will give you back a harvest of thousands or perhaps millions! In this way they fleece the pockets and impoverish the lives of thousands of poor Christians. True Christian leaders do not love money. (1 Timothy 6:6-10).

#3 Jesus expects elders to have a stable godly character (verses 7-8)

In the third place Jesus expects elders to have a stable, godly character. There are a host of qualities in verses 7 and 8 that together amount to a stable godly character:

- *Not overbearing*—doesn't always insist on his own way!
- *Not quick tempered*—he does not have a short fuse
- *Not violent*—literally does not use his fists to solve disputes
- *Self-controlled* —there are no excesses in his life
- *Upright and holy*—a godly man
- *Disciplined*—his life is orderly; his time and money are under his control
- *Loves what is good*. He loves good people and food films good programmes and good books! He does not love “Game of Thrones” or “Love island” for example.

The tragic case of Molly Russell has highlighted the world of evil out there on the internet! Brothers and sisters, let us love only what is good, “Whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable, - if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things.” (Philippians 4:8)

An elder must possess, like his Master, a stable and godly character, born of constant prayer, and repentance, regular self-reflection and daily reliance on the purifying power of the Holy Spirit. But do these qualities describe all of us? Which one do we need to ask the Lord to help us with?

#4 Jesus expects elders to love people

In the fourth place an elder must love people. Well, of course, for he will be a shepherd of people, like the Lord Jesus who loved the sheep so much that he was even prepared to lay down his life for them. Verse 8, “he must be hospitable.” The word here is *philozenos*, quite literally someone who loves (*philo*) strangers (*zenos*) (people he does not know). His love of people is revealed especially in the way he reaches out to the stranger: he seeks out newcomers in the coffee hall, he welcomes outsiders into his home for meals. You desire to be a leader in the church? Then you must have a reputation for loving people—especially newcomers. But, we say it again, the Lord wants all of us to love one another and help those in need: “*Share with the Lord's people who are in need. Practice hospitality.*” (Romans 12:13) “*Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling.*” (1 Peter 4:9)

#5 Jesus expects elders to love the truth (verse 9)

Finally, church leaders must love the truth, verse 9. The emphasis is not so much knowing the truth but holding to it firmly. An elder doesn't play fast and loose with truth. He's got no interest in novelty or the latest theological fad, just the apostolic "trustworthy message", just the old old story of Jesus and his love.

Summary

What is the Holy Spirit saying to us this morning? Have we been listening out for his voice? Perhaps you are an elder, and these words in Titus 1 both encourage and challenge you. Perhaps you aspire to be an elder—but you know you need to ask the Lord to help you with this trait or that. Perhaps you are not an elder but a leader in the church, or the leader of your home, these are the qualities Jesus is looking for in you.

For all of us, let us pray for and honour our elders as they teach, guide, love and protect the flock. It's not an easy task, we need your prayers and loving support. So that we can be more and more like the Great Shepherd of the Sheep who provides for all our needs, leads us in straight paths, feeds us with the bread of heaven, protects us from harm, lovingly restores us when we go astray, has suffered for our sins and one day bring us into his Father's house forever.