

Pure Church: Pure Leaders

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[0 : 00] Number of weeks, taking a section at a time. Last week we went, well, this little letter of Titus is all about growing or building a pure church.

That's the big theme that we're taking through this letter. And a key verse for this, I think, is in chapter 2, verse 14. Just have a look at it there as a simple reminder. Chapter 2, verse 14. It says there that Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good.

So God's desire is that he would not only save and rescue his people, but his desire is that he would purify them, that he would make his church pure.

And the first major step in that process is to have pure leaders. And that's what we're going to look at this morning. And as we do, we're going to ask four questions about leaders and how that all leads to a church or leads to a church that's going to purity.

[1 : 24] The first is, why do we need leaders? What do leaders do? Who should be a leader? And how do we appoint leaders?

So four simple questions to look and unpack this section. So question one, why do we need leaders? Well, as we've seen in recent years in Ireland and our experience of it is that we've had very poor leadership.

Political leaders, religious leaders have been the cause of so much damage and hurt. So in response, people will say, well, you know what? We don't really need leaders. We're better off without them.

Even the church is better off without leaders. The rejection of Croke Park 2 and the protests at Thatcher's funeral in England all prove that, well, leadership is not always welcomed.

However, God in his wisdom has given his church leaders, which is always for our good and for our best.

[2 : 32] In fact, it's not only essential to have leaders, it is an absolute priority. Look at verse 5. This is the first command that Paul gives to Titus.

The reason I left you in Crete was so that you might straighten out what was left unfinished and appoint elders in every town as I directed you.

So the church needs straightened out. It's become very messy, higgledy-piggledy. There's all sorts of things going on that ought not to be happening.

There's impure teaching and it has all led to impure living. And the way to straighten it all out, the way to put it right is, as it says there in verse 5, is to appoint elders in every town as I directed you. You see all over Crete, where he is, there are these small house churches that have been established in little towns and villages.

[3 : 45] But they're in great danger of becoming impure. They're beginning to drift. And the way to put them right and the way to have them as God intends them to be is, first of all, as it says there in verse 5, is to have elders or leaders in place.

Leaders who are going to put down solid foundations that will build a church towards purity. So the first question, why do we need leaders?

The answer is very simple. To establish a pure church. So question number two.

What do leaders actually do? That's something that my friends often say to me. So what do you do? Kind of like, I mean, I know you do stuff on Sunday, but what do you do the rest of the week?

The smart answer is, oh him, well he doesn't do very much. Well, whatever our opinion, we are told what leaders should be doing.

[4 : 51] Look at verse 7. It says there, since an overseer. Now he's changed the word there in verse 5 or verse 6, it talked about an elder.

An elder and an overseer are the same. Sometimes it's translated as bishop. Elder, overseer, bishop, they're all the same thing. An elder is kind of looking at his character. An overseer describes more the work of an elder. So verse 7. An overseer is entrusted with God's work.

So the overseer, the leader, is given the responsibility primarily of taking care of God's church. He doesn't own the church, but he has been entrusted with looking after it.

He must oversee it. That's his responsibility. And how do the elders do that? Well, look down at verse 9. He must hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been taught.

[6 : 00] Hold firmly to the trustworthy message. The trustworthy message is nothing less than the gospel. It's the gospel. It's the gospel that Paul has heard that has been passed on to him.

And now Paul is passing it on to Titus. And Titus is now passing it on to the church. And the church is to pass it on to the people. So this trustworthy message is nothing less than the gospel, the good news, that whole body of teaching that is being passed down to each generation.

And Titus is to hold on to it, have a firm grip upon it. He's not to let it go. In other words, he's to make it the pattern of his teaching and the pattern of his life.

The gospel, the word of God has got to remain central because the gospel is what directs a church and the gospel is what's going to correct the church.

So the primary responsibility of the overseers or elders is to make sure that the gospel, the good news of Christ, informs the life of the church and also shapes the people of the church.

[7 : 16] This is how you ultimately care for the church. This is how you oversee the church. And that's why we together, as we are even now, spending time under the gospel, under the word, because it's what informs us and what shapes us.

Now with that gospel word, the elders have got to do two things. Look at the rest of verse 9. He must hold firmly to it, hold on to it, make it priority, make it central.

And here's the reason. Look at the second part of verse 9. So the purpose of teaching sound doctrine, which is the same as the trustworthy message, is to encourage people, is to support people, is to build people up in their walk with Christ.

It's to encourage us in what Christ has done for us, not what we can do for him. So let me right now encourage us all in the gospel.

Have a look at chapter 3, verse 4. These are great verses. This is a wonderful summary of the heart of what the gospel is all about and where we need to keep coming back to, to remind us of what Christ has done and not what we can do.

[8 : 38] So chapter 3, verse 4. This is a reminder to encourage us that when the kindness and love of God, our Saviour, appeared, he saved us, not because of righteous things we have done, but because of his mercy.

He saved us through the washing of rebirth and the renewal by the Holy Spirit whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ, our Saviour.

These are great things. These are wonderful things that he intervened into our lives. He took the initiative out of his kindness, saved us, and is renewing us and changing us day by day.

That builds me up because I know that I mess up and I need this Saviour every day. So he's got to encourage the church in the gospel.

Well, second, in the last part of verse 9, it says there, so that he can encourage others by sound doctrine and refute those who oppose it.

[9 : 46] So again, the other reason is not just to encourage, but the reason to teach the gospel is to refute. It's to tackle a false gospel.

It means that we are to confront and correct everything that is in opposition to the gospel and God's word. And that's what the rest of chapter 1 is making clear.

There's a lot of impure teaching going on and it's led to all kinds of impure living. And he's got to confront it. He can't just let it go on. He's got to correct it.

Otherwise, the church is going to fall apart. And we'll be looking at that more next week. So these are the two things the elders must do.

They've got to keep the gospel, the word of God, central. It's got to be informing and shaping the church. And the way he does that is by encouraging people in the gospel and by challenging a false gospel.

[10:49] So what do leaders do? Well, simply this. They nurture people. They build people up towards purity with the gospel.

That's what leaders ought to be about. Which brings us to question 3. Who should be a leader? Well, it's all about character.

Not letters after the name. It's all about character. Not the letters after someone's name. Which I'm very thankful for because I don't think I've got any letters after my name.

But character. That's what's important. Chapter 1, verse 6. An elder must be blameless.

And the same is repeated in verse 7. An overseer, an elder, is entrusted with God's work. He must be blameless. Now, I do not stand before you, and Ralph, who's also an elder, isn't sitting before you, as blameless.

[12:01] Are we? No. Just ask our wives. We're not perfect. We're not saying we are perfect. None of us are perfect. It simply means we are to be without blame.

In other words, there is to be nothing in an elder's life that disqualifies them from leading. And the way to test is to look at an elder's family life and to look at his public life.

Examine their family life and their public life to see if there is anything that disqualifies from leading. Now, before we jump on the back of an elder and start pointing fingers, let's remember that the details here that are following in verses 7 through to 8, this is actually the expectation for all God's people.

What we expect to see in a leader's life, we should also expect to see in every single Christian. In fact, a very helpful exercise if you wanted to do this through the week is to read through verses 7 and 8 and find the equivalent for every other person in the life of the church.

And you can find the equivalent in the letter of Titus. So what's expected of a leader, you will also find is expected of every single person in the church.

[13:37] But back to our question, who should be a leader? Well, let's look at their family life. Verse 6.

An elder must be blameless, the husband of but one wife. Now, this does not mean an elder must be married, but if he is married, he must only have one wife.

And not just legally. He must have one wife practically. In other words, as a husband, he must be devoted and loyal and faithful to his wife.

He doesn't have eyes for another woman, real or virtual. He's a one woman man who loves his wife, who delights in her, who wants to spend time with her and gives himself in sacrificial service to his wife.

So men, listen up. If you are married or you anticipate on getting married, are you the husband of one wife?

[14:57] Not just legally, not just because it says so on the piece of paper, but practically. Or are you withholding your affection and love from your wife?

Are you giving your devotion to someone else or to something else? The husband of but one wife. Men, husbands, love our wives well. Well, we're not only to look at his relationship to his wife.

We are to look at his relationship to his children. Look at the rest of verse 6. The husband of but one wife, a man whose children believe and are not open to the charge of being wild and disobedient.

Well, that's a hard one, isn't it? Does it really mean that an elder son or daughter must be a Christian, that they have to be believers?

[16:11] Seems to say that. Well, I struggled with this and had to do a lot of reading and thinking about it. And to understand it correctly, let me, let's look at two things to try and understand it.

First of all, and I'm no Greek scholar, okay? So you check it out for yourself if you're a Greek scholar. From what I've read and from looking at those who do know the language better, they tell us that the word here, believe, in verse 6, a man whose children believe, also means faithful. It's the same word. In fact, through the pastoral epistles, which is 1 and 2 Timothy and Titus, it uses the word interchangeably, believe or faithful.

So in that case, verse 6, would be that an elder's children are to be faithful, meaning they are to be submissive and obedient to their parents.

So, it could have that meaning. But if we look back to 1 Timothy chapter 3, verse 4, so just go back a couple of pages to 1 Timothy chapter 3, and verse 4.

[17:36] Paul here is giving the same instructions to Timothy about elders. We've been reading about it in Titus, but here he's giving the same instructions to Timothy about elders.

But look what he says here in 1 Timothy chapter 3, verse 4. He must manage his own family well and see that his children obey him with proper respect.

Do you see the difference? He's not saying here that they must be believers. He says they must obey him with proper respect. And here's the reason, 1 Timothy 3, verse 5, if anyone does not know how to manage his own family, well how can he take care of God's church?

So I don't think Paul is saying one thing to Timothy. He's not saying to Timothy, well look, it doesn't matter if your children aren't believers, if you have any. That doesn't matter. But to Titus, he says something completely different.

Well your children have to be believers. I think he's saying the same thing, but in different ways. An elder's children must be faithful.

[18 : 55] That is, his children must not be undisciplined and disobedient or reckless in their living. How can we manage a church family if we cannot manage our own family?

And if our own children are out of control, how can we ever lead God's children? But as we said, these things are not just about leaders.

They do apply to leaders. But this is something for us all as fathers. And again, we just talked about the men, so let me now again address the fathers.

If you have children or if you plan on having children, this is what we are called to. We must not abdicate our God-given responsibility.

It's too easy an excuse for a father to turn around and say, well that's the wife's responsibility. They're at home most of the time. That's what they do. And it's not the school teacher's responsibility.

[20 : 07] And it's not the church's responsibility. As a father, and I speak as a father with two children, we have responsibility to lovingly discipline our children so that they learn obedience and respect.

So watch a father with his children and you will know if they are fit to be an elder.

So, who should be a leader? Well, look at their family life, their relationship to their wife and their relationship to their children.

if they have a wife and if they have children. Second, we must look at their public life. And again, this applies to us all.

Verse 7. Since an overseer is entrusted with God's work, he must be blameless, not overbearing, not quick-tempered, not given to drunkenness, not violent, not pursuing that dishonest gain, rather, he must be hospitable, one who loves what is good, who is self-controlled, upright, holy and disciplined.

[21 : 43] Now, he's listed here five negatives and they are contrasted by five positives. I've put holy and disciplined as one couple.

So, five negatives contrasted by five positives. And we've listed them and you'll see on the screen side by side so you can follow. Let's go through them one by one.

First, he says, they should not be overbearing but hospitable. So, we must not be pushy and arrogant so that it becomes uncomfortable to be around people who are like that, who are pushy and arrogant and always wanting their view and not listening to others.

Instead, he must be welcoming of others, warm and open home and open life, putting people at their ease. Not overbearing but hospitable.

Second, not quick tempered but self-controlled. He must not lash out verbally or physically, crushing people with his words or breaking with his fists.

[23 : 05] Instead, he must be one who is measured and can in his every response, listening carefully and can in what he has to say and what he has to do.

Third, not a drunkard but holy and disciplined. In other words, he must be one who is not dependent on alcohol or known for getting drunk instead, he must be separate from, that's what it is to be holy, is to be separate from.

So he's to be separate from this kind of behaviour and disciplined, not being mastered by unhelpful habits. So not a drunkard but holy and disciplined.

Fourth, not violent but upright. he must not have a temperament that is like a hurricane or a volcano which destroys and erupts, hitting his wife or lashing out at his children.

Not violent but upright. Instead, he must deal with people with gentleness, bringing peace into a troubled situation and bringing calm where there's upset.

[24 : 52] So not violent but upright. And fifth, not pursuing dishonest gain but love what is good. he's not out to make as much money as possible.

Being in the business that I am in and I talk about my role as an elder and a teaching elder, it's not here to make as much money as possible and to get as much out of people regardless of the effects of others.

Instead, he is to be one who is other centered, generous with his resources, always looking for ways to support those in need practically and financially, not pursuing dishonest gain but loves what is good.

So let me say this, watch a man in his public life, examine his public life, and you will know if he is fit to be an elder.

So who should be a leader within the church of God? Well, one who lives a life of purity. Question four.

[26 : 20] How do we go about appointing leaders? Well, it's very clear that we should not self appoint. In fact, whenever you are in churches and situations where leaders self appoint themselves, well, then you end up in all kinds of trouble.

And I think there are two very helpful principles here to help us understand how we can appoint. First, there's the responsibility of the elders.

elders. While there's no set manual within scripture that you can look up and find kind of like elders, section 3.5D, elders, and you read all about it, it's not like that.

But what we do have are very clear principles to apply, and I think this section here in Titus is a very clear principle. In this case, Titus obviously qualifies as an elder, and he's been given the responsibility, go back to verse 5, of appointing elders in every town.

So this is his first task, this is his calling as he goes to these churches, these new little groups, these house churches, he is to appoint elders.

[27 : 41] And plurality, not just one, it's always plurality, when we look through the Bible it's always more than one, so at least two, that would lead the local church.

So he's to appoint them, he's not to appoint people who he likes, or people who he just happens to get on with, or people who will do what he says. No, the people that they must appoint are those who are accountable to the whole church family, it's not done in isolation.

Which brings us to the second, and the two work together, the accountability to the church. You see, the qualifications that we've just looked through are to be used by the church to test those who would be leaders.

Elders are accountable to the church, they are not separate from the church. So I stand before you this morning as one who has got a responsibility, but I am also accountable to people like you. You are to hold me and Ralph accountable to what we've just been looking at. That is your role, and it's serious. So in practice then, when elders put a man forward, he must first be tested by the church because he is accountable to the church.

[29 : 12] And if when the church examine and look at his family life, his relationship to his wife and his children, and look at his public life, and see that those things are all in place, then it's something to support and to encourage.

The church does not appoint people they like. They do not appoint people to bring in a certain kind of change or to do things differently just because they like it.

Rather, we appoint those who measure up to God's standard of purity. So how do we appoint leaders? Well, we appoint leaders with pure motives.

So four very simple questions. Why do we need leaders? Well, because we need a pure foundation. We need to establish something solid.

What do leaders do? They nurture people towards purity with the gospel. Who should be a leader? Those who reflect a pure life.

[30 : 29] And how do we appoint them? Well, all of us have a role and responsibility. And we must do so with pure motives. And if we have these things together in place, then it begins to move the church onwards, keeping it pure and growing each person in a life of purity.

Remove this, and a church will digress into impurity. needless to say, this is serious.

And so I ask that you would pray for your leaders. Pray for them. They face the same kind of struggles, the same kind of issues as you.

We sin, we fail, we mess up. And so we need you to pray that we would live up to what God has called us to be.

But pray also that God would raise up leaders. Leaders for this church, leaders for Kinsale, leaders for wherever the next church plant may be.

[31 : 46] Because this is what will grow the church and grow us to be more pure. let's pray right now.