

Appoint good church leaders

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[0 : 00] So the reading today is Titus chapter 1, that's page 1200 in the Church Bibles, and we're reading from verse 1 to 16.

Paul, a servant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ, for the sake of the faith of God's intellect and their knowledge of the truth, which accords with godliness, in hope of eternal life, which God, who never lies, promised before the ages began, and at the proper time manifested in his word, through the preaching with which I have been entrusted by the command of God our Saviour.

To Titus, my true child in a common faith, grace and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Saviour. This is why I left you in Crete, so that you might put what remained into order and appoint elders in every town as I directed you.

If anyone is above reproach, the husband of one, wife, and his children are believers, and not open to the charge of debauchery or insolvency.

For an overseer, as God's steward, must be above reproach. He must not be arrogant or quick-tempered, or a drunkard or violent or greedy for gain, but hospitable, a lover of good, self-controlled, upright, holy, and disciplined.

[1 : 48] He must hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught, so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine, and also to rebuke those who contradict it.

For there are many who are insubordinate, empty talkers and deceivers, especially those of the circumcision party. They must be silenced, since they are upsetting whole families by teaching for shameful gain what they ought not to teach.

One of the Cretans, a prophet of their own, said, Cretans are always liars, evil beasts, lazy gluttons. This testimony is true.

Therefore, rebuke them sharply, that they may be sound in the faith, not devoting themselves to Jewish myths and the commands of people who turn away from the truth.

To the pure, all things are pure, but to the defiled and unbelieving, nothing is pure, but both their minds and their consciences are defiled.

[2 : 52] They profess to know God, but they deny him by their works. They are detestable, disobedient, unfit for any good work. Well, please keep Titus chapter 1 open.

And you'll also find on the service sheet, there's an outline of the talk, which is, as you can see, not terribly sophisticated today.

Two very simple points, but that might help you to follow where we're going. Shall I pray as we have the Bibles open in front of us? Our Father God, we simply pray, please, that what we don't know, you will please teach us today.

And what we have not become, you will please make us today. Please do that by your grace, the grace that has appeared to us in the person of the Lord Jesus.

And we ask it for his name. Amen. Well, the country is in a mess. You can't trust anything you're told.

[4 : 00] Adverts airbrush their photos to deceive us. Newspapers rely on alternative facts. Friends pass on distorted gossip.

You can't go out at night because we're afraid of violence, of knife crime, of the gobby group shouting obscenities. People don't work hard at their jobs, whether it's cleaners or national leaders. Everybody's fiddling expenses. Everybody's trying to get away with doing as little as possible.

Obesity is a big problem. People just sit around and eat all day until they're too big to fit through the door.

Young people brag about how horrible they've been to older people on the bus. And old people lose their dignity by getting drunk and bitter.

Every day there's a story of some terrible new thing that somebody somewhere has dreamt up that's even more shocking than that terrible thing that shocked us yesterday.

[5 : 03] A panorama expose and some celebrity we trusted is accused of abuse. Some outrage. Somebody somewhere shoots over 200 rounds of ammo into a crowd.

People behaving like animals. Welcome to first century Crete. See, look down to chapter 1, verse 12.

Because this is the story here. This is what Crete is like. Liars. Evil beasts. Lazy gluttons. Why are we talking about Crete, an island far away and long ago?

Because Titus, Paul's troubleshooter, has been sent there. And he's been sent with a job to do because the church is going off the rails and it's being derailed by poor leadership.

And it's not just a single church, but it seems in a whole lot of churches right across the island. And Titus, look down to verse 5, has been given a job to do. He's got to straighten things out, put things in order, and appoint elders in every town.

[6 : 13] It's not so hard, is it, for us to imagine a Mediterranean island where young people indulge themselves and older ones tolerate it, saying, well, it's only natural.

Crete then, not so different from the UK today. I might like to claim we live in different times, of course, the age of the British dream, apparently. That's when we live.

We may describe British identity with a whole list of terribly positive things. You know, we enjoy the rule of law and right and wrong and the pluralist state and personal freedom.

But we all know the reality is not actually that different from first century Crete. It may be 1,600 miles and 2,000 years away, but we've not managed to end up anywhere better.

My description at the start, you thought I was talking about Britain today. And actually, our church leadership today nationally is not so different either.

[7 : 11] A recent survey of Church of England clergy found that only half believe that Christ is the only route to salvation. Only a third believe in the physical resurrection of Jesus.

Only 8% of clergy believe in the virgin birth. One commentator said this, there are clearly two churches operating in the Church of England. The believing church and the disbelieving church, and that is a scandal.

Increasingly, positions of authority are being placed in the hands of people who believe less and less. That is an intolerable situation. The faithful are increasingly being led by the unfaithful.

And I hardly need to make the point about morality in the national church. I mean, we're shifting massively at an incredibly alarming speed to accommodate the behavior of society.

The message seems to be the church accepts it all. Whatever you do out there, of course you can do that in here. We accept you. We're totally accepting of sin.

[8 : 13] Totally tolerant of it. Now don't misunderstand. Titus is, in the question of Titus, of Paul's question, it's much bigger than debates at General Synod or issues of church order or kind of church rules.

Paul is concerned about this church because he's concerned about Christians. About us. And he's concerned about society. You see, given the society of first century Crete and given the church leaders in Crete, what hope is there for our society, for our nation, for us?

What hope is there of it ever being any different? What hope is there for change? So now see how Paul writes this letter to Titus.

And let me just show you a little catchphrase that comes lots of times. Look down to chapter 2, verse 7. Share yourself in all respects to be a model of good works.

Chapter 2, verse 14. Jesus gave himself for us to rescue us from all lawlessness and purify for himself of people for his own possession who are zealous for good works.

[9 : 28] Chapter 3, verse 1. Be obedient to be ready for every good work. Chapter 3, verse 8. This saying is trustworthy. I want you to insist on these things so that those who believed in God may be careful to devote themselves to good works.

Chapter 3, verse 14, which is like a kind of summary of the whole letter. Let our people learn to devote themselves to good works. Did you hear it? Was I not subtle enough?

Good works. Like a long drink of refreshing water in a dried up culture characterized by lies and evil and laziness and greed.

Good works. That's very different, isn't it? From the culture of Crete. From our society. And the engine that is going to bring about that change to produce good works, that real change, is the

gospel.

Look down to chapter 1, verse 1. It's the knowledge of the truth which accords with godliness or which leads to godliness, that produces godliness.

[10:34] Christians say, we say, Paul says here in this letter that he writes, that the Christian gospel results in Christians doing what is good.

Knowledge of the truth leads to godliness, real change. Because the grace of godliness, God's ridiculous act of kindness, totally one-sided and unexpected.

His grace that appeared in Jesus not only saves us, it also trains us. Look at chapter 2, verse 11. The grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives.

Grace saves, verse 11. We're perhaps familiar with that idea. God brings salvation for all people. But also, verse 12, grace trains, the grace of God that came to us in Jesus.

That is the engine for real change in our lives. That's what is going to produce the kind of good works that we long for in our Christian lives, that we'd love our church to be known for.

[11:51] And that's the title for our sermon series in this letter. It comes from those verses in chapter 2. Grace saves, grace trains. That's why our world needs grace.

It needs grace. Grace to save us and grace to be the engine to change us. Now, the passage we're going to look at today is chapter 1, verses 1 to 9.

And it's all about who should be a leader in the Christian church. Who should take the lead. And obviously, in a letter with this kind of subject, the kind of leaders we should look for are those who know the truth and live the truth.

They should understand and believe the gospel, this grace that saves and trains. And they should show that very clearly in their good works.

What they believe, how they behave should match. It's obvious, isn't it? I mean, imagine one without the other, for example. Imagine a church leader who behaves uprightly, admirably, very well, very nice bloke, but couldn't explain Christianity to you.

[13:00] Just doesn't understand it. That'd be hopeless, wouldn't it? I mean, that captain confused. Imagine the other way around. Imagine a church leader who knows loads of stuff but doesn't live it.

Has a reputation for being a nasty so-and-so. That would be a major meltdown, wouldn't it? Neither would be what we need, what our church needs, nor what our world needs.

Now, maybe you're thinking this seems a bit obvious. I mean, kind of, of course that's what we need. But let's pause for a moment and ask why Paul is saying this to Titus. Before we get to our section today, verses 1 to 9, let's ask why this is being written.

Why Paul is saying this to Titus, his protegee, who's in Crete, to finish off Paul's work there. And the reason he's saying it is because there's an alternative.

There's an alternative to this grace gospel that saves and trains. An alternative to the knowledge of the truth that leads to godliness. And it's talked about in the second half of chapter 1, a passage we're going to look at next week.

[14:10] And it's where we learn about the other leaders in the church who were accepting what Crete was like with a kind of shrug. A sort of, well, we're only human.

Boys will be boys. What can you expect? I mean, obviously we've got to expect what educationalists call boy behavior. That's what everybody does. You know, let's be realistic what people living in Crete in light.

Of course they're liars, evil beasts, lazy guttuns. I mean, we're all a bit like that, aren't we? It's just who I am. Don't be so hard on yourself. It's the way of the world. It's how we are, how we're made. What can we do about it, say the church leaders with their shrug?

Well, we could cover it over with a veneer of religion. And it seems that there was a kind of Jewish flavor to this religion. Talk a lot about circumcision.

They talk about Jewish myths. But the point is it's religion as a way to cover up the cracks. Some of you know that we're due to be moving house in just a few weeks' time.

[15:14] Just a couple of roads along from where we are. And the house we're moving into has got some work that needs to be done. Carpets need cleaning. By the way, if you know somebody who could do that.

Holes need filling. Walls need repainting. And there's some exposed brickwork down in the cellar which is crumbling. Now, of course, we could cover it over with some sheets of MDF and

plasterboard.

It'd look like a new wall. That's a bit of what was going on in Crete. That there were these people saying, well, there's no chance of changing what the people who live in Crete are like.

Cretans? Well, everybody knows Cretans are Cheetans. Cover over the cracks. You know, whitewash over the sin. Let's, a couple of coats of Dulux gloss paint from their new religion range. We could try that color crushed cassock. Sort of dirty shade of white. Just painted over the top. The nearly pure look. It'd look as good as new. Look down to verse 16.

[16:18] These guys profess to know God, but they deny him by their works. Chip away, you see. They're detestable, disobedient, unfit for any good work. Somebody was telling me about a church service they'd been to recently for the whole of their school for St. Michael's Day.

This person said in the whole service there was no mention of Jesus or of the cross or of our need for salvation. The sermon was about the message of St. Michael killing the dragon.

Apparently the message of that story, St. Michael killing the dragon, is be kind. I mean, you couldn't make it up, could you? Social conservatism with the thinnest of religious veneers.

Now, can you see the message of alternative that we set up here? You've got good work, that's the catchphrase of the letter, good work produced by the gospel. Or, end of chapter 2, verse 16, staying still, unfit for any good work, with no agent to bring about change.

As if the idea is carry on with what everybody else does, come to church on your Sunday, wear your Sunday best, and it'll all be alright on the night. No, no, no, says Paul, that's not good enough.

[17:37] The gospel really, really changes you. It saves you and trains you. Knowing the truth and living the truth. Godliness that matches up to the truth.

Truth that produces godliness. The one goes with the other. So that's what we should look for in our church leaders. Let's come to our first heading. Phew, you're thinking, finally.

Appoint church leaders, then, who live the truth. Here is Titus, left in Crete. His job is to appoint elders who are, verse 6, above reproach, the husband of one wife.

His children are believers and not open to the charge of debauchery or insubordination. For an overseer, as God's stewards, must be above reproach. He must not be arrogant or quick-tempered or drunkard or violent or greedy for gain, but hospitable, a lover of good, self-controlled, upright, holy, and disciplined.

Now, looking through that list, which one of those things, or any of those things, are unique to being a church leader? You know, in those qualities, those characteristics, which of them would you say, well, obviously, that's what a church leader should be like, but it's fine for an ordinary church member, a bog-standard Christian.

[18:51] They don't have to be like that at all. You know, an elder must have only one wife, but other Christians can have as many as they like. An elder can't be a drunkard, but everybody else can come to church totally wasted.

Self-controlled, well, obviously, an elder, but we can all just let rip. That would be ridiculous, wouldn't it? All Christians should be like those things we've just read, verses 6 to 8.

And, in fact, the word here in verse 5, appoint elders, is literally olders. Older people. It's the same word as in chapter 2, verse 2.

Older men. In chapter 2, different groupings within the church are addressed. Older men, older women, younger men, younger women. It's the same word here in verse 5, appoint older men. Look among the older men, the more mature men in your congregation. Because, of course, all Christians, as we grow older, as we grow more mature as Christians, all of us should be aspiring to be like verses 5, 6, 7, and 8.

[20:00] Church leader or not, we should all be living out this truth. If we know the truth, if we've embraced the truth, then the truth will lead to godliness. Chapter 1, verse 1.

So the people you want standing up in front of your church are older Christians who show they are Christians by this kind of stuff. They show they know the truth because they live the truth.

As we all will do. It's not that they model perfection. But if you watch them, you can see that they know the gospel because they're living the gospel. Pursuing holiness with a gritty determination.

The elder's lifestyle shows that the gospel has done its work. Now, of course, this is important for me personally in my role at the Corn Hill training course.

Training people to teach the Bible. Hopefully, they're going to learn lots. They're going to know the truth better and better. Sorry, Michael, I didn't mean to catch your eye at that very moment.

[21 : 07] At the end of the year, writing tutor reports, how do we evaluate whether they've learned anything? Well, presumably, one thing we should do is look at their life.

They should have grown in godly character because what they believe and how they behave, those things match always. The gospel will bring about real change.

You should be able to see this. Are these people you're thinking of appointing to leadership showing that they know the gospel because they're living it? A mature Christian will be above reproach.

The gospel means that there'll be truth speaking instead of lies.

Not empty talk that we discover is going on in the second half of chapter one. No, not empty talk, but productive talk. Truth producing godliness. The gospel puts families back together instead of families being turned upside down.

[22 : 15] Families are ordered, stable, and on course. What a change. See, why settle for the veneer of religious observance when grace will save you and train you and turn you from a godless, self-indulgent life to live in this world with wisdom and righteousness and devotion to God?

Appoint church leaders who live the truth. And secondly, appoint church leaders who know the truth. Verse 9. He must hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught.

So he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict it. I've given it the heading, know the truth.

But of course, the word actually here is hold firmly to the truth. Hold on to it. Who know it so firmly. Who are so committed to it. Who so believe it, verse 9, that they'll guard the church.

By making sure that's what's taught and that alone. And they ensure it partly by stopping that those who teach something else aren't allowed to teach.

[23 : 24] And you could say, looking through this list of verses 5 to 9, this is the only task on the job description. The whole lot of essential qualities, but this one task.

Know the gospel. Believe the gospel so firmly, so clearly, that he can teach it and shut up those who don't. Why does the church leader need to be able to shut up verse 9?

Those who contradict it are gone. Again, back in Crete, there are these other people, these other teachers. And if you look down to verse 11, we're told that they're teaching what they ought not to teach.

Wrong stuff. They're empty talkers and deceivers, but they are teaching. In fact, they even seem to be experts in theology, these guys, in verses 10 to 16.

They talk about it lots. Verse 16, they claim to know God. They profess that they know him. But Paul says appoint church leaders who really know, actually know.

[24 : 30] Not those who claim to know but don't. And they know it so that they hold on to it firmly and will not tolerate anything less.

I think that's one of the reasons why, I think that is the reason why one of the criteria to look for is look at their home life. In other words, what are they like when the front door shuts?

Are they tolerating error and its consequences within their home? So what about their family? Are their children like those other church teachers?

Are they disobedient? That's the key word that describes the false teachers. See, if somebody who is a would-be elder, if their children are like them, then that shows this older man is tolerating within his home the very stuff he ought not to be tolerating.

He's not refuting error behind closed doors like he ought to. So you don't want them as church elders. So verse 13, be ready to, they've got to be ready to stop the rot.

[25 : 44] To rebuke sharply those who've got an unhealthy message. Because the church needs healthy, sound doctrine. That's what we need. And these are the kind of leaders the local church needs.

They need to be appointed to every town. In Dulwich, just like everywhere else. That's what Paul says in verse 5. Every church needs men like this. Leading the church.

Who live the gospel because they deeply know the gospel. They will protect the church. So that we too will know the truth.

That leads to godliness. That's God's strategy for us. That's God's strategy for Dulwich. Just as it was for Crete. Now if Titus were listening to this letter today.

This passage today. What would he now go away and do? Well he'd be absolutely clear wouldn't he about the kind of people he should appoint as church elders. He'd not be going around looking for

somebody he happens to like.

[26 : 49] One of his mates. He's not looking for somebody who's a very nice man. He's not looking for somebody who seems particularly zealous. He's looking for somebody who genuinely is godly.

And who can teach the truth that will make other people godly. And he's to appoint them. Give them the job. The people most like Titus today I guess.

Are anybody with the job of appointing church leaders. Perhaps they're part of selection procedures for candidates for ministry. Or maybe appointing a new minister for a local church.

Or appointing an elder in a local church. Different churches call them different things. But those in a congregation who share in leading that church. It's vital isn't it from this. Who should be getting that job?

Appoint a godly man who will teach the Bible. Somebody who knows the truth and lives it. And although this letter isn't written to elders. If you are a church elder listening to this.

[27 : 56] I guess you'll be pricking up your ears saying. Well this is telling me what I need to be like. What I need to do. I need to know and live the truth. I need to be like Paul describes here.

This is my job description. This is the qualities that should exemplify me. That I should be showing. This is the task I've got to do. And for all of us who aren't elders like that.

For everybody else sitting here. I guess it's clear we need to be in a church with leaders like this.

Isn't it? Here are the criteria we need to have. Not just for our leaders.

But for our church. The church we go to must have leaders like this. This is God's strategy for change. This is how I will change.

By being in a church like this. With somebody who knows the truth and lives the truth. Somebody who in their life shows it. And in their ministry is teaching it. So I guess for us sitting here today.

[28 : 55] This is obviously a passage about Simon isn't it? And this is what we have in our leader. And these are the things we need to be praying for him. Lord may the truth lead to more godliness in Simon.

May he hold so firm to your word. That he tells me what it says and nothing else. Give him the guts to confront me. When I'm going off course.

If I'm contradicting that truth. I guess it applies too to our church wardens to it. As well doesn't it? To Ben, to John. They're teaching elders alongside Simon.

They share in chapter 1 verse 9. Isn't it? That's part of what they're there to do. Protecting us. Well we need them to keep showing us in their lives. That they still know and live the truth.

They're still committed to that. For our church staff. For our growth group leaders. This is what we want them to be like isn't it? To know and live the truth.

[29 : 58] Maybe too in a looser way. This applies to anybody who's got some kind of teaching role. Who share in giving instruction. In any part of our church life.

We want mature. Stable. Growing Christians. Who've got enough gumption to them. That they'll stick doggedly to the trustworthy word.

Why? Because we want to be healthy Christians. We want our church to stand for something. To preach and practice change.

Gospel change. For lip and life to match. We want, don't we? Those who lead our church. To live the truth. To teach the truth.

To know the truth and hold on to it so firmly. That their lives show it. They've been gripped by the gospel of grace that's changed them. And that's what they can't help themselves.

[30 : 58] Talking about and proclaiming. Let's pray together. Father God, we pray for Simon.

We pray for Ben and John. For Andy and Jenny. For all who lead in our growth groups. For those who are right now teaching in Sunday Club.

Lord, we long to be a church that's so gripped by the gospel of grace. We know it firmly.

We hold on to it firmly, tightly. It's not just gripped our minds and our lips. But it's grabbed our lives and changed us.

So our lives show that we know this gospel. And we long for that not just to be the character of those who lead us. But for that to be the character of our church.

[31 : 53] For that to be our reputation as a church. Because of what we're really like. Not just acquiescing to the spirit of the age of the shrug. And promoting religion. But standing for a gospel that brings about real change.

So please would you week by week be changing all of us. As we listen to that trustworthy word that's being held on to. As we get instruction in that.
Please would you be working to change us. We pray that the knowledge of the truth will lead to godliness. In our personal lives and in our church lives. For our good.
For the glory of Jesus. For the good of our nation. We ask it in Jesus name. Amen.