

The Need for Good Leaders

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Preacher: Andrew Price

[0 : 00] People want good leaders, which is why they're so quick to pounce on any moment. They're not good. And we want good leaders in our churches too, don't we? I wonder though what your criteria for a good church leader would be.

What would make the perfect pastor? Some years ago, quite a number of years ago actually, that question was put to loads of churches around the US and they surveyed what people thought the perfect pastor was and they collated the data and put the results together as follows.

The perfect pastor unpacks God's word completely but preaches for exactly 10 minutes. He makes 15 home and hospital visits a day but is always in his office to take calls.

He works from 8am till midnight each day of the week but always looks refreshed and energetic. He is 28 years old but has 40 years of experience. He gives generously to the poor, buys theological books, dresses well but is paid just \$40.

a day. This was some time ago. And the survey results end by saying the perfect pastor is always in the church next door. Now the data was deliberately put together with those contrasts to show that sometimes we have unrealistic expectations of our church leaders.

[1 : 18] But it does raise an important question which is, well what does make a good church leader? And why do we need them anyway? Well today, as Victor said, we're beginning a short series looking at Paul's letter to Titus while Mark is away.

And you can see in verse 5 of your Bibles there that the reason Titus was left on the island of Crete was to appoint elders. Now in the Bible there are only actually two levels of church leadership. We have three, bishop, priest and deacon I think. But in the Bible there's only two levels, elders and deacons. Elders were sometimes called overseers, like in verse 7 of your reading, which is where we get the word bishop from.

And in 1 Peter 5 an elder is also called a shepherd who pastors his flock, which is why we're sometimes called pastors. But the point is an elder is like a church pastor.

And before we get to what makes a good one, Paul actually begins the letter with an introduction and underlying his purpose for himself, and I take it for all pastors actually.

[2 : 29] So at point 1 in your outline, verse 1 in your Bibles. He says, Paul, a servant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ, to further the faith of God's elect and their knowledge of the truth that leads to godliness.

Now in Paul's letters he often gives clues to why he's writing in his introduction. And so we'll spend a bit of time here. And did you notice Paul's purpose here?

He's a servant or literally a slave of God and an apostle of Jesus to, what's it say? Further the faith of God's elect and their knowledge of the truth, doesn't it?

In other words, his purpose, and I take it his purpose for all church leaders, is to help people grow in faith and truth. This is why we need them in part. This is why in part we teach you the Bible, to help you trust in God and know God's truth more and more.

But is that all? I've got a couple of true or false statements for you. I'll give you an easy one to warm up with on the next slide. True or false? Today is Sunday. True.

[3 : 38] Okay. Oh, that was hot today. Okay. Here's the relevant one on the next slide. We read the Bible just to know more about God. Oh, I had a couple of truths, had a couple of falses.

If we read the Bible just to know about God, and it stops there, then it's false. Because what does verse 1 say? He says, to further the faith of God's elect and their knowledge of the truth that leads to godliness.

Yeah. The end point is a changed life. You see, we are to encourage people to grow in their faith and truth, not just so you get every Sunday school question right, but so that we'll live godly lives.

Because what you're taught to think shapes how you live, doesn't it? In fact, when Michelle and I were first married, our first disagreement was over the role of the tea towel. I know, silly now, looking back. But anyway, she was taught a tea towel was to get off any dirt or scraps that the person washing the dishes missed. So when she washed the dishes, it didn't matter if she missed something.

[4 : 51] I was supposed to just get it off with the tea towel. But I'm already a little bit OCD, right? And I was taught that the tea towel was for drying perfectly clean dishes. Thankfully, we now have a dishwasher.

Don't fight as much. But the point is, how you're taught to think shapes how you live. And so Paul's purpose for himself and other church leaders is to further people's faith and knowledge of the truth, to think God's thoughts after him, that we might live godly lives like him, that we might reflect God's character of goodness.

And this goal of goodness or godliness is peppered throughout the letter of Titus. So on the next slide, you see a whole stack of references.

1.8, talking about elders loving what is good, being an example, doing what is good, telling Christians that we are to be eager to do what is good. 3.1, be ready to do whatever is good. The next slide. 3.8, 3.14, it's all the way through the letter of Titus. Paul's purpose is for us to grow in faith and truth so that we in turn might live godly or good lives.

[6 : 06] And this is especially important for those who lived on Crete because Crete was a place where people were not good. Just have a look at verse 12 for a moment. Just skip down to verse 12 or across the column to verse 12.

Paul quotes one of their own philosophers, which your footnote says is a man called Epimenides. And what does he say about his own people? Well, that Cretans are always liars, evil brutes, lazy gluttons.

Can you imagine having that as your reputation? I still remember actually people calling a bad person a little Cretan or Cretan, depending on how you pronounce it.

Now, I suspect that's where it comes from. But the Christians were supposed to stand out as different, to have a different reputation, one of being good or godly.

And it's the same today. People in Melbourne may not have the same reputation as Crete, but in Melbourne, people still lie, they still do evil, and they are still gluttons, aren't they?

[7 : 09] My father-in-law, who's been with us for the last week, went to the cricket on Boxing Day. And he doesn't mind a beer, but even he was surprised at how much alcohol was consumed by people even before lunch.

There's still gluttonous. You see, morally, Melbourne is not that different to Crete. But we are to be different. Now, we'll come back to this idea of being godly and good over the next two weeks.

The point here, though, is that Paul's purpose for himself and pastors in general, I think, is to help people grow in faith and truth, which leads to, verse 1, godliness.

And this is, in part, why we need church leaders. Of course, living a godly life in Melbourne is not always easy, particularly at work or at university. And so he reminds us that it will be worth it, in verse 2.

A life that leads to godliness in the hope of eternal life, which God, who does not lie, promised before the beginning of time. You see what he's saying?

[8 : 22] We are to live godly lives in hope of eternal life. We are to let our future glory move us to live present godly lives.

For it will be worth it. Now, again, Paul will unpack this more over the coming chapters. And so, for now, just notice that our hope is not wishful thinking. Rather, it is certain, did you notice?

Because God does not lie. God is not like a politician who makes election promises with his fingers crossed behind his back. God does not lie.

And so, if he promises it, then he'll give it. And what's more, he's already revealed it through the preaching of his word, verse 3. And which now, that is, the eternal life, which now, at his appointed season, he has brought to light this eternal life through the preaching entrusted to me by the command of God, our Saviour.

You see, Paul has been entrusted to preach the gospel message about Jesus, his death and resurrection for us. And it's by the preaching of this message that the hope of eternal life is brought to light, both in terms of being made known and also being made possible.

[9 : 43] For as this message of Christ is preached, people both hear about eternal life and if they believe the message, they receive eternal life too, don't they?

This message both tells them about it and is the means to give it. And so, it matters that the right message is preached. Doesn't it? I mean, if there was a fire burning close here in Doncaster and the fire brigade captain came up here during our service and started to preach to you the directions to be saved, then we both know how to be saved and if we believed him, we would be saved. But imagine if the fire captain got up and actually preached the wrong directions to be saved from the fire. I mean, that would be disastrous, wouldn't it? Imagine if that was happening now in New South Wales as the fires are burning.

You see, it matters that the right message is proclaimed, doesn't it? And so, it matters that the leaders are the right sort of people to proclaim it.

And so, no wonder Paul firstly tells Titus what sort of elders to appoint. So, point two, verse five. He says, The reason I left you in Crete was that you might put in order what was left unfinished and appoint elders in every town as I directed you.

[11 : 12] Now, just for those who don't know, on the next slide is a map. So, Crete is that island in the Mediterranean Sea. It's part of Greece. And the fact that Paul left Titus there implies that Paul was with Titus at some point, doing what Paul always did, that is, telling people about Jesus.

And in God's kindness, Cretans became Christians. But Paul needed to move on, so he left Titus there to finish establishing this young church, which would have met in lots of different homes around the place.

And to establish this young church, Titus had to appoint elders in every town. But because these were the ones to teach God's truth that would shape people's lives in godliness, then it mattered that the right elders were appointed.

So what is the criteria for a right elder or good pastor? Well, verse 6 to 8, An elder must be blameless, faithful to his wife, a man whose children believe and are not open to the charge of being wild and disobedient.

Since an overseer or elder manages God's household, he must be blameless, not overbearing, not quick-tempered, not given to drunkenness, not violent, not pursuing dishonest gain. Rather, he must be hospitable, one who loves what is good, who is self-controlled, upright, holy, and disciplined.

[12 : 39] Do you notice we're told twice that they are to be blameless? Verse 6 and verse 7. They are to have a blameless character if you want to summarise it.

Now, being blameless doesn't mean being sinless, otherwise we wouldn't have any elders ever. Rather, to be blameless means to be one who observably and faithfully walks with God.

It's kind of how God put it to Abraham on the next slide. So, in Genesis chapter 15, God had declared Abraham right with him by faith, and then later on in chapter 17, God appeared to him and said, walk before me faithfully and be blameless.

Now, we know that after chapter 17, Abraham was not perfect, nor was Noah or Job, who were both also called blameless in the Bible. But they all observably and faithfully walked with God. Not perfectly, but consistently. And for the elders of God's church, this is their key criteria. It's not to be charismatic or charming, it's to be blameless in character.

[13 : 56] And Paul picks out some examples of this. So, verse 6, he is literally to be a one-woman man. That is, to be sexually faithful. Now, I don't think it's saying that an elder must have a wife and kids.

It simply assumes they will. And if they do, then he must be faithful to her. Flee from all, free from all affairs, whether physical or emotional or virtual on the computer.

After all, how many churches have you heard of that have been torn apart by a pastor's affair? How much damage has been done to the kids of those families and to the gospel?

Have not most of us heard of some church minister whose marital unfaithfulness has caused havoc? I have, sadly, too often. And is not the church's reputation in tatters right now because of some church leaders who have abused children?

You see, a good leader is to be sexually faithful. And if he has children still at home, then they are to be faithful or trustworthy, as your footnote says there.

[15 : 08] Which I mean, I think means to their parents. They need to be obedient to their parents because the rest of the verse says they are not to be open to the charge of being wild and

disobedient.

And that's what Paul says in 1 Timothy in the parallel passage. 1 Timothy, I'll tell you later, I can't remember the verse off the top of my head. So, they are to be faithful to the parents, that is, obedient to the parents.

That's why? Well, verse 7, because they will manage God's household. So, if they cannot manage their own household, how will they manage God's household, you see? And so, when churches look for a pastor or another staff member or whatever it is, it's entirely right that we meet their family if they have one and observe how they relate, even though that's not how the world works.

But you see, this is not the world we're dealing with. This is something much more precious to God. It's his church. And so, given it's God's church, this blameless character is unpacked more with five negatives or nots.

Do you see verse 7? Not overbearing, not quick-tempered, not given to drunkenness, not violent, not pursuing dishonest gain. And again, how many churches have been ruined by ministers who have been greedy for money or been overbearing?

[16:27] It's why Mark Driscoll had to resign, you might remember. In fact, when I was growing up, we had a pastor who was quick-tempered. If you didn't do what he wanted, and I'm not talking about stuff from the Bible, I'm just talking about what he wanted to do, then he would bite your head off.

He even swore at some people in the church. And so, it was a Baptist church and so some of the deacons, as we called them, said, no, look, this is not on, you need to leave. He took half the church with him.

30 years later, that's my parents' church, it still hasn't recovered from this minister. Character matters. And then you've got the six positives of being blameless, hospitable, which in the Bible is not about having your friends around for lunch, it's about welcoming strangers as God has welcomed us.

And so the pastor must look out for the stranger on Sundays and welcome these outsiders in. He must love what is good, delight in it, live it, be self-controlled, upright, holy, disciplined. You see, it's a picture of being godly and good.

It's blameless in character. On the next slide is an article from a business journal which says that the five key criteria for being a leader, it's quite a long article so I've summarised them on the next slide.

[17:41] These are the five key criteria. Motivated, competitive drive, hard work, positive outlook and takes chances. God doesn't care about those.

God's criteria is blameless in character. So if they're not godly then they're not fit for ministry. Even if the person can preach the best ten minute sermon ever which I've already failed at, I'm sorry, tell the most riveting stories, have the most humorous jokes, why did the chicken cross the road?

It doesn't matter. Character matters. It's why in our first reading God told Samuel not to pick Eliab who looked impressive, he was tall and his appearance was good.

Remember what God said? People look at the outward appearance but God looks at the heart, the character. Character is king. It's what matters most.

[18:44] It's godliness before giftedness. Why? Well because a church leader is meant to also not just teach but be an example for others to follow which is exactly what Titus is told on the next slide in chapter 2 verse 7.

So if they're to be an example for others to follow then their character matters, doesn't it? And let me say if you're thinking about doing any sort of ministry whether it's Bible study, Sunday school, whatever it is this still applies.

In fact it actually applies to us all do you realise? Because if we're to follow their example then all these characteristics are the things we're to aspire to as well.

I'll come back to that later but can I also say for this particular congregation here tonight for the regulars particularly while Mark is not here can I say I think he has this character.

I've known him for eight years now and I think he has the kind of blameless character spoken about here one worth following. The character also matters because it affects what the person does with God's word.

[20 : 02] If they're not blameless in character then they're less likely to be faithful in scripture. Instead they will twist scripture to match their own evil desires. But an elder who is blameless in character will seek to be faithful to scripture no matter what.

And so this is the last qualification in verse nine. He must hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it is being taught so that he can encourage others by sound doctrine and refute those who oppose it.

Notice again it's not about being skilled at communicating God's truth it's about being faithful to God's truth. Literally clinging to the message like a child clings to her teddy.

I saw this picture on the next slide of this little girl clinging to her teddy I thought it was pretty cute but you can tell she loves that teddy can't you? She's not going to let it go. Well so too an elder must cling to God's truth without letting any of it go which in our world is not easy to do.

Especially when so many other pastors are letting parts of God's word go. But a good pastor will cling to God's truth to be faithful to scripture. So they can firstly encourage people with sound doctrine to live godly lives like verse one and secondly so they can refute false doctrine which overturns lives.

[21 : 23] Verse 10 he says they need to be sounding doctrine because there are many rebellious people full of meaningless talk and deceptions especially those of the circumcision group.

They must be silenced because they are disrupting or literally overturning whole households by teaching things they ought not to teach and that for the sake of dishonest gain.

One of Crete's own poets or prophets has said Cretans are always liars evil brutes lazy gluttons.

This saying is true therefore rebuke them sharply so that they will be sound in the faith and will pay no attention to Jewish myths or to the merely human commands of those who reject the truth.

Remember it seems that there was lots of house churches scattered around the island and so without elders there anyone was coming in and teaching whatever they liked it seems as some Jews in particular were teaching false doctrine and literally overturning whole households and if the church was meeting in the house then possibly even whole churches and so this is also why we need good pastors who are faithful to scripture not just so they can teach sound doctrine which encourages godly living but so that they can rebuke false doctrine which overturns lives now I don't have time it's a bit hot I don't have time to unpack what this false doctrine was instead let me finish with some application for us now I realise that this chapter has lots to say to church leaders or aspiring church leaders like Mark and myself and Vijay but as I said it also has something to say to you too no matter who you are remember part of the reason an elder is to be blameless in character is because they were to be an example to others so if this list is an example of what we are to follow then these things are things that we should all aspire to be especially those who do ministry and so I wonder is there something in this chapter that with

God's help you need to grow in more next year perhaps it's being less quick tempered or less overbearing or more faithful to scripture despite what your friends or family think what area from this chapter could you grow in in a moment I'm going to leave a moment of silence and let you pray for God's help to grow in that area this next year but secondly we also need to have God's expectations for church leaders is what matters to God what matters to us is character king for both our pastors and ourselves or do we go home and have roast dinner or roast minister because we didn't like something the minister Mark said or something he did or whatever it was what matters most to us about our church leaders when we look for a church if we have to move how are we going to decide and will we thank

[24 : 49] God given Mark's not here that he does have a blameless character and seek to follow his example I know he's not perfect I'm not no one none of us are but he does I know love you 5pm people and seeks to serve you and help you grow in faith and truth that you might grow in godliness so do thank God for him and pray for him well let's pray and take a moment of silence to pray in your own heart and mind for God's help to grow in that area of godliness you chose let's pray our gracious heavenly father we do thank you that you love your church so much so you gave your son to die for us as your church and father we thank you for mark whom you've given to this congregation in particular and we thank you for his character we pray that you would sustain him in his ministry this coming year and father for ourselves as your word tells us to follow good examples help us we pray to aspire to have these same attributes this same blameless character help us in this we pray that we might live lives that honour and please you in Jesus name

Amen