

## Leadership above Reproach

Titus 1:5-9 (09//02/18)

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Titus 1:5-9 *For this reason I left you in Crete, that you would set in order what remains and appoint elders in every city as I directed you, 6 namely, if any man is above reproach, the husband of one wife, having children who believe, not accused of dissipation or rebellion. 7 For the overseer must be above reproach as God's steward, not self-willed, not quick-tempered, not addicted to wine, not pugnacious, not fond of sordid gain, 8 but hospitable, loving what is good, sensible, just, devout, self-controlled, 9 holding fast the faithful word which is in accordance with the teaching, so that he will be able both to exhort in sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict.*

We are going to talk about “trustworthy leadership” this morning and next Sunday. I don’t know of a more relevant issue for our day. This summer has seen a rash of the betrayal of trust by church leadership across the country and in foreign countries. Many of these betrayals have been sexual in nature and some of them absolutely bizarre. Rome is reeling under all the revelations and even the Pope is being charged with cover-up or inaction. This is nothing new within the Catholic Church. Immorality was rampant even in the papacy historically. We know that the whole teaching of a special priesthood is unbiblical to start with. Every believer is a priest. And then the decision in 1139 forbidding priests to marry just added fuel to the fire. It is both unbiblical (1 Timothy 4:3) and unnatural.

Sadly, however, even biblical churches have not remained unscathed from the moral offenses in leadership, stabbing the trusting hearts of congregations. There is a slew of examples from pastors to counselors to youth workers to college professors and others in positions of authority taking immoral advantage of trusting souls under their leadership. Just this summer a pastor who was highly regarded for solid, passionate preaching was charged with immorality and forced to step down. Once a man disqualifies himself with adultery he should never be restored to a pastoral position again. This is one response in a good church that has purged all evidence of its former pastor, “We grieve the shame this brings to the Gospel and the sorrow it brings to God's people.”

Trustworthy leadership is absolutely foundational to the health of the local church. Randy Alcorn describes ministry not just as a task, but as “a sacred trust.” That’s why Paul commanded Titus to find qualified elders for these churches in Crete to nurture godliness among the leaders, the membership, and their citizenship in the world. This morning we’re looking at trustworthy leaders in verses 5-9. God emphasizes three aspects of trustworthy leadership for His church. Trustworthy leadership is essential, qualified in character, and able to build up and protect the people of God.

### **TRUSTWORTHY LEADERSHIP IS ESSENTIAL FOR THE HEALTH OF THE LOCAL CHURCH – v. 5**

*For this reason I left you in Crete, that you would set in order what remains and appoint elders in every city as I directed you,*

Titus was a Gentile and Paul’s trusted representative. When Paul left Crete, he told Titus to stay and assigned to him the task of bringing good order and leadership to the believers scattered throughout the 100 cities on this island of Crete, lying south of the Aegean Sea between Greece and Asia Minor. Crete is about 160 miles long – from here to St. Louis. At places it was 30 miles wide – from here to Princeton. Paul and his assistants had evangelized the island and both Gentiles and Jewish Cretans had come to Christ. Now they needed local church structure for their spiritual health and growth. 1 Timothy 3:16 talks about conduct in the local church “which is the pillar and support of the truth.”

God maintains His work on earth in this dispensation through local churches. Missionaries go out to unevangelized areas, preach the gospel, and establish local churches with structure and order. Where do we meet? When do we meet? What do we do when we meet? Who’s going to lead us when we meet? In Acts 2:42 the early church met for teaching, fellowship, communion, and prayer. There were lots of new

believers to be taught, disciplined, counseled, and encouraged to grow. This is the purpose of the local church. This is one of the reasons we so appreciate the ministry of Campus Outreach. They understand the importance of the local church and follow through by encouraging their students to get up on Sunday mornings and get to their local church to hear God's Word. The believers on Crete also needed this structure. They were a people known for being fierce, cheating, lying, and greedy. Their spiritual growth needed lots of teaching on how to live for the glory of God. Titus had a big job cut out for him, and finding trustworthy leadership was his first task.

### **TRUSTWORTHY LEADERSHIP DEMANDS CHARACTER QUALIFICATIONS – vv. 6-7**

*6 namely, if any man is above reproach, the husband of one wife, having children who believe, not accused of dissipation or rebellion. 7 For the overseer must be above reproach as God's steward, not self-willed, not quick-tempered, not addicted to wine, not pugnacious, not fond of sordid gain, 8 but hospitable, loving what is good, sensible, just, devout, self-controlled,*

Biblical local church leadership is always through qualified men called elders, or overseers, or shepherds. All three refer to the same office in the church. Mark Dever has written a great little book called *The Deliberate Church*, where he points out what an elder is not. He is not just an older man; age isn't a qualifying factor. He is not just a successful business man; wealth and power in the community do not qualify. The Bible is crystal clear that local church elders are to be men. We love and deeply appreciate all the godly, doctrinally-sound ladies in our church who teach other ladies or youngsters. But regardless of cultural pressures, we follow God's truth that says qualified men are to be church leaders. God also warns us in 1 Timothy 3:6 about appointing new converts to high positions. Doing so could easily spawn pride and even a spiritual collapse to a young Christian.

Campaigners are not qualified. These are men who come to church with their "suitcase" full of their own agenda as to how they are going to teach or lead or change the church. When men come with an agenda and intend to get a position of influence, we tell them the same thing we tell everyone. First, be faithful in attendance. Then go through the Newcomers' Class. Then be willing to serve in submission to the elders. As you serve, opportunities will come to demonstrate your giftedness and your qualifications.

So who is qualified? Mark Dever writes, "An elder is simply a man of exemplary, Christ-like character who is able to lead God's people by teaching them God's Word in a way that profits them spiritually." Then he adds, "When biblically qualified men are leading a church with character and skill, it is a deep and wide blessing for the unity, holiness, and spiritual growth of the church.... As elders model holiness in lifestyle, gentleness in speech, selflessness in relationships, soundness in doctrine, and a loving concern for other members of the congregation, the church will be encouraged to think of godliness in like manner."

Before surveying these qualifications, note that Titus was to appoint not one elder, but elders in each city (vs 5). Acts 14:23 says that Paul and his men appointed elders in every church. That means there were a group of men leading the each church. The plurality of elders is perhaps the most important aspect of church structure, and Faith Bible Church is committed to that structure. God has given us trustworthy elders. There is mutual accountability and a diversity of giftedness among our elders that is just wonderful. While ability to communicate is important for an elder, none of the qualities listed in these verses is about speaking skills. Instead, they focus on character.

**First, a trustworthy leader must be a godly example in his home.** God says he must be above reproach as a husband and as a father. It is so interesting that God puts "a one woman man" first under being above reproach, which simply means he can't be accused of any impropriety. He has to have eyes only for one woman, his wife. He certainly can't be a polygamist, possibly not a divorced and remarried man, but most of all being absolutely and without question faithful to his wife.

Being a godly example in his home doesn't rule out singles, but singles need to be absolutely committed to moral purity if they are going to be in leadership. Way too many cool single youth leaders have betrayed trust. Whether married or single, he must practice thorough, unquestionable moral purity. He cannot indulge in pornography, which is a huge problem.

A married man must be devoted to his wife and treat her with honor. He is a 1 Peter 3:7 husband by being considerate and respectful to his wife. He must live out that self-denying love of Christ for the church. He is very careful to protect himself from inappropriate female contact. He should never meet with a lady behind closed doors. He will stay away from any situation where he could be charged with inappropriate behavior.

Then, a trustworthy elder he must be an Ephesians 6:4 father who doesn't provoke his children to wrath, but works to bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. We love to see these couples populating the earth with little image bearers, and every father here knows how much he depends on his wife in rearing children. But a church elder himself must have a testimony and involvement at home with the children so that they at least respect faith in Christ and the Bible and aren't running around wildly without discipline. 1 Timothy 3:5 says "he has them under control." He isn't neglecting his children, but teaches them, reads the Bible to them, reviews Bible verses with them, or memorizes a catechism with them. He does all he can to embed truth and love for Jesus in their hearts. Then he trusts a sovereign God to do that work of regeneration. We are excited about Tedd Tripp coming in November to conduct his parenting conference with us. Take advantage of being refreshed in ways to guide your children to God. Invite friends.

**Second, a trustworthy leader must be a godly example in his personal life.** Verses 7 and 8 require godliness that is evident in the man's life. And there isn't a thing here about his skill in preaching or setting up programs. He must be above reproach. No one can accuse him of failure in these areas of character. He must live what he teaches. Tommy Nelson tells about a preacher who got on a bus in London and the driver gave him too much change. The preacher sat down and had a debate in his heart – was this his lucky day or should he take it back. He took it back and the driver said, "I purposely gave you too much change. I heard you preach about honesty the other day and wanted to see if you practice what you preach." The world is watching and Satan sticks his foot out to trip us up.

Notice two things in these verses. He's described as an overseer, or as the KJV translates it, "bishop." This means he's responsible to be a watchman over the flock. Hebrews 13:17 says, "Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they keep watch over your souls as those who will give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with grief, for this would be unprofitable for you."

Being a "watchman over the flock" is a stewardship from God. Church leaders will give an account of how they managed God's people. Acts 20:28 describes the elders' calling like this, "Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood." God expects every elder to be a trustworthy leader over God's blood-bought people. What a high and holy calling. We dare not mess it up.

God gives us a set of negative character qualities and a set of positive ones.

A trusted leader in God's church cannot be:

- Self-willed – head-strong, stubborn, overbearing, demanding his own way.
- Quick-tempered – a short-fuse who easily flies off the hand. 2 Timothy 2:24 says he must not be quarrelsome but kind to all, patient when wronged, with gentleness correcting those who oppose.
- Addicted to wine – he can't be addicted to any substance.
- Striker – I have never seen this happen, but those Cretans were pretty furious and needed leaders who didn't call you outside to settle matters.
- Greedy – fond of sordid gain or filthy lucre. Greed, sex, and power are the three goliaths every leader must, like David, lop the heads off. Plutarch said Cretans stuck to money like bees to honey!

A trusted leader in God's church, purchased with the blood of Christ, must be:

- Hospitable – he loves people, a lover of strangers. He can't run from the pulpit and hide from people.
- Lover of good – he looks for ways to bless people. He loves giving and doing good to others.

- Sensible – this is a key word, used four times. He isn't foolish in his decision making. He has biblical values and priorities and lives them out. His wife helps him with this. He isn't driven around by the latest cool church growth fad or cultural movement sweeping into the church.
- Just – he treats others with fairness. He is sure to leave a nice tip for the server.
- Devout – he is unquestionably devoted to his Lord Jesus Christ. It also means holy. Robert Murray M'Cheyne said, "My people's greatest need is my personal holiness."
- Self-controlled – he's got Spirit-empowered discipline in his life. He isn't lazy. He disciplines his time, his desires, his appetites. He disciplines himself to read, pray, counsel, and prepare. He isn't a slouch.

No one can accuse him of any of these negatives or positives. Not that he's perfect; far from it. It's not perfection, but direction. We are all needy and who is sufficient for these things. But there should not be any glaring problems in the man's character.

### **TRUSTWORTHY LEADERSHIP MUST HAVE UNQUESTIONABLE CONVICTIONS ABOUT GOD'S WORD – v. 9**

*holding fast the faithful word which is in accordance with the teaching, so that he will be able both to exhort in sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict.*

The church is the pillar and support of the truth. We here at Faith Bible are all about teaching, preaching, discipling, and counseling God's Word. So leaders must hold fast the truth of the Word. Holding fast means it has a hold on you and you have a hold on it. A trustworthy leader has a strong, unwavering, unquestioning commitment to the truth of Scripture, from Genesis to Revelation. He isn't seduced by smooth or persuasive false teachers. When we studied the Anatomy of the Church, we talked about the five non-negotiables: Elders must be committed to a high view of God, the sufficiency of Scripture, sound doctrine, personal holiness, and godly leadership that is absolutely and unquestionably trustworthy.

Ladies and gentlemen, I am so blessed to be part of an elder team that is all of this. Our elders are holding fast to the faithful Word of God. Whether preaching, teaching, discipling, leading small groups, counseling individuals or couples, we are committed to being biblical, both to build up the body with positive truth and to protect the body by exposing false teaching. John Calvin said, "The pastor ought to have two voices: one, for gathering the sheep; and another, for warding off and driving away wolves and thieves." And Martin Luther said, "A preacher must be both soldier and shepherd. He must nourish, defend, and teach; he must have teeth in his mouth and be able to bite and fight."

Next week we'll see that there are wolves out there intent on leading God's people astray. We have to refute them and sometimes that means pointing out movements and people by name. Refute means to reprehend severely or call to account. There are always those who are promoting, selling, and persuading people of their slick new teaching, and elders or overseers or shepherds are required by God as a stewardship to protect the flock.

Every believer wants his or her church to have trustworthy leadership. You want leaders of integrity and wisdom, a crucial issue in our day. Pray for your leaders, that God would keep them strong in the Lord and in the power of His might; fully armed in the battle against Satan, who loves to see leaders fall into the cesspool of moral failure. Appreciate their labors among you and be submissive to their leadership, as Hebrews 13:17 says, "Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they keep watch over your souls as those who will give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with grief, for this would be unprofitable for you."