

Titus 1:5-9 Sermon

“Portrait of a Leader”

I fondly remember first learning about and memorizing the Presidents of the United States.

- That's when I first heard the inspirational story of **George Washington** and the cherry tree incident. How I remember it was that George was a young lad and he received, as a gift, a shiny new axe. He was so excited that he immediately rushed out into the family yard and begin to test out it's ability to chop various things down. He chopped down some corn stalks and chopped up some small logs. Over time George became more and more proficient with it and one day actually chopped down his father's prize cherry tree. His dad upon seeing it chopped down was furious and rushed inside and demanded to know who the culprit was that chopped down his tree. Young George stepped forward and confessed, "I cannot tell a lie, I chopped down the cherry tree" Taken back by his honesty, George's father's heart melted and he hugged his son and forgave him. Of course many years later it's pretty evident that this cute incident never happened and was actually invented by a preacher/book seller who wanted to sell more copies of his own book recounting the life of George Washington. However, I still remember hearing that story for the first time and being quite impressed with the honesty of the first president of the United States.
- Fast forward about 100 years and we encounter **Honest Abe Lincoln** the 16th president of the United States. And I remember hearing the story of Abe who, while he was working as a clerk at a store realized that he'd short changed an individual a few pennies and promptly shut down the store and walked several miles just to return his pennies to him. And this story served as a good example of the commitment to honesty that Abraham Lincoln had throughout his life. When Abe served as a lawyer in Springfield, Illinois his advice to potential lawyers was: "*Resolve to be honest at all events; and if in your judgment you cannot be an honest lawyer, resolve to be honest without being a lawyer. Choose some other occupation, rather than one in the choosing of which you do, in advance, consent to be a knave.*" (*knave is a dishonest man*).
- **Grover Cleveland** (the 22nd & 24th president of the U.S.) When Grover Cleveland ran for president in 1884, he was endorsed by the **New York World Newspaper**, which listed four reasons for encouraging its readers to send Cleveland to the White House: "*1. He is an honest man. 2. He is an honest man. 3. He is an honest man. 4. He is an honest man.*" He was known for his integrity and for going after corruption in the government as a legislator and as governor. When running for the presidency Republicans were excited when they uncovered and exposed an affair he'd had with a single woman and fathered a child. The Democrats were scrambling to minimize the potential damage to his chances of winning and were trying to plan the proper spin to put on the story. But Cleveland admitted the affair and in a telegram told them, "Whatever you do, make sure that you tell the truth". Voters were impressed, once again with Cleveland's honesty, and voted him in as President.
- Now fast forward to last summer when we were observing one of the nastiest presidential campaigns in history. **Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump** were both lobbying to become the next president of the United States, largely by calling each other a liar. Many polls conducted at the time revealed that only about 1/3 of the population believed that either candidate was honest or trustworthy. And since Trump was elected very little has changed, about 2/3 of the American people still don't trust the President and many organizations love to tally up all the lies and misstatements that the president continues to spew out on a regular basis. Adherence to the truth that characterized some of our presidents in the past seems to have been pushed to the side. Many of our modern politicians would fit right in on the island of Crete in the first century where one of it's own poets said: "*Cretans are always liars, evil brutes, lazy gluttons.*" ("Titus 1:12 (NIV))

It's on this island that the apostle Paul left his protégé, Titus, to "*complete things that were left unfinished*" in the brief time Paul was there and to also *appoint elders in every church on the island.*

And in his instructions to Titus, Paul makes it very clear that within the church, the leaders need to be committed to **honesty and integrity and being a good witness everywhere** (out in the world, within their families and within the church). It's a reminder that Christians and Christian leaders are called **not to blend in** to the world but **stand out as a light** to a dark world. This morning we're going to look at this list of qualifications Paul gives Titus to use as he looks for elders for every church. And what we'll quickly discover is that what God's most concerned about is **not accomplishments but character**. God has proven over and over throughout history that He loves to take people who's heart is right with Him, regardless of their background, and use them to impact the world.

As we look at this list it would be easy and perhaps convenient to believe that these don't apply to you since you're not an elder within this church. However, what you need to realize is that most of this list should apply to every follower of Jesus Christ. It would be very helpful to take what we're about to discover and apply it to your life as a guideline or a standard to strive for.

Secondly, this isn't a list where anyone is going to live this perfectly and God realizes that. But the great news is that when we sin there is forgiveness offered to us. But there's a difference between occasionally sinning and sinning without caring. And Paul is setting out for Titus a list of qualifications that describe a person/leader who is continually seeking after God.

So, please follow along as I read **Titus 1:5-9**.

Now, I don't have time to dig into each and every one of these traits individually, but I want to give you a sense of what God is looking for in each of our lives and in the lives of every church leader.

1. He starts with **an elder must be blameless**. This kind of an overarching quality under which all the other qualities fall. It's also **listed twice** (again in **verse 7**). The idea of **blameless** is that you live your life in such a way that no one, neither unbelievers or believers, can accurately bring a charge against you. A great example of this would be **Daniel** in the Old Testament whose enemies wanted to dig up some dirt on him to discredit him to the king, but as hard as they tried they couldn't find anything. And here's a powerful statement that any of us would love to have said of us: *"They could find no corruption in him, because he was trustworthy and neither corrupt nor negligent."* (Daniel 6:4) Daniel was very intentional and careful in how he lived his life. He was blameless. Wouldn't it be great if someone hired a team of private investigators to dig up some dirt in your life and they checked all of your emails and phone messages and followed you around for weeks and couldn't find anything with which to discredit you? When you claim to be a Christian you're put under a microscope and the nonbelieving world is watching you. What will they discover as they watch your life. Many of you have skeletons in your closet with which they could discredit you. You know what, repent of those sins, allow God to cleanse you of them and begin a new with a commitment to do nothing that would discredit you and your relationship with God to a watching world.
2. **Faithful to his wife**: Literally in the Greek this says a *"one woman man"*. What exactly does this mean? Does it mean that he's only ever had one wife, not divorced and remarried or widowed and remarried? In the Roman culture that Crete was a part of, it was not uncommon for a man to have 3 women in his life. He'd have usually a housekeeper or slave girl that took care of things around the house and he could have sex with. Then he would be married and he'd have sex with his wife for procreation and then in the local temples to other gods there would be prostitutes that would offer themselves up as part of the worship service. And as immoral as Crete had a reputation for being, it's highly likely that Paul is stressing the faithfulness of a man to his wife and her alone. But in body, heart and mind. Today's application may be that the man doesn't fantasize about other women or go pursuing images on the internet etc. That as the world watches it's clear that this man is committed to his wife alone. And this act of faithfulness stands out from the practice of the culture.
3. *"a man whose children believe and are not open to the charge of being wild and disobedient."* This character quality is stressing the importance of being active and a spiritual leader in their home. To many church leaders become so busy with church activities that they can easily neglect their responsibilities at home. And yet, if you can't even be a leader in your home then what business do

you have being a leader within the church? The other thing I'd say here is that this is not just about keeping your children under control. I've grown up in the church and attended other churches while away at college and seminary. And I've known church leaders who technically would meet this qualification, in that their children were believers and were under control, but they ruled with an **iron fist**. Their children lived in fear of their dad, even though he wasn't really there much. That's not what God's looking for. He's looking for fathers who are blameless in their homes as well. He's looking for fathers and mothers who demonstrate God's love and grace and patience in their homes. He's looking for parents who don't just drop off their kids at church but rather inspire their children to seek after God by seeing their example everyday. God's looking for parents who model to their kids a **passion for the Lord**. Parents who seek after God daily, not just on Sunday. Parents who model to their kids **praise of God as a daily practice**. Children who see parents' whose hearts are tender to God because of His tenderness, love and grace given to them and consequently their hearts are tender and open to their children as well. Now, I don't believe this is saying or implying that you need to have children in order to be qualified to be a leader in the church. For many years we had an elder here by the name of **Don Anderson**, (the husband of Gladys Anderson). They never had any biological children but him and Gladys were constantly taking young couples and individuals under their wing and showing hospitality to them and inviting them to share meals with them. They were spiritual parents to all sorts of people through the years. And today we have **Mike Neururer** demonstrating that same compassion for others, even though he has no biological children he has a whole lot of people that him and Cindy reach out to and show God's love.

4. This goes right into the next trait: *"Since an overseer manages God's household, he must be blameless – not overbearing."* This implies that if an overseer (or elder) is overbearing in their home, then they aren't blameless. If they rule with an iron fist in order to keep their children under control then they aren't the kind of leader God is looking for. God has been tender toward you and He expects that same tenderness to be demonstrated to others through you.
5. *"not quick tempered"* This implies outbursts of anger (explosiveness) and seems like a continuation of the character quality above. . **1 Corinthians 13:5 (NIV)** *"Love does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs."* When do we typically get quick-tempered? When our perceived rights are violated. When I'm not treated the way I believe I deserve to be treated? However, a real leader realizes that because of their many sins they deserve God's judgment and instead have received God's grace, therefore they show that same grace and peace to others. When the sinful woman crashed the party that Simon was throwing for Jesus and anointed his feet with an expensive perfume Jesus said to Simon the host, Luke 7:47 (NIV) *Therefore, I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven—as her great love has shown. But whoever has been forgiven little loves little."* The implication being that what motivated this woman to do this extraordinary act of love to Jesus was that she realized she'd been forgiven much – therefore she was motivated to love much.
6. *"Not given to drunkenness."* Notice that he doesn't condemn drinking but his life is not controlled by alcohol. When things get tough this leader doesn't go to the bottle for comfort and help. Instead they turn to the Lord. Paul said a very similar thing in **Ephesians 5:18 (NIV)** *Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit,* and Paul's point is what controls your life? Is it wine or the Lord, via the Spirit? If Paul was writing to today's culture he might include such things as opiates or the media or TV or sports etc. What consumes your time and energy? Do you spend more time with the Lord or any of those others things that can so easily control your life? Maybe it's gambling. I had an uncle years ago that gambled away the deed to their house and left him and his wife homeless.
7. *"Not pursuing dishonest gain."* The Cretans were famous for this, for justifying whatever it took to get ahead. The ends justified the means. Plutarch said that *"Cretans stick to money like bees to honey."* What place does money have in your life? Is it an all-consuming desire? The idea is that the ends justifies the means. And history has many examples of church leaders who got caught up in the

pursuit of money through ministry. There's nothing wrong with money or even having it. But the love of money is the root of all evil. It's so alluring and tempting.

After Paul has listed 5 things that a leader of the church should not have in his life, he now proceeds to list several positive things that they should be characterized by.

1. *"He must be hospitable"* The Greek word literally means, *"He loves strangers."* They are not just consumed with what's going on in their lives and in the life of their family but they are also looking out for the needs of people outside of the church. You see your relationship with God is never meant to be just you and God. God's intent is that His love would fill you to overflowing so that it spills out onto others. And this can take on all sorts of forms. It could be praying for others, or helping them out with a purchase or finding ways to show God's love to others. In the first century it likely meant allowing visiting preachers to stay in your home or Jews who accepted the Lord were most often ostracized by their own families and would need a place to stay. This spirit of being hospitable doesn't happen by accident. It needs to be very intentional.
2. *"one who loves what is good."* Because of God's love living in their hearts, they are naturally drawn toward things that are basically good and turned off by evil. And the more and more this principle is growing in your life the less draw sin will have on you. You become more and more in love with God and the things that He loves and are repulsed by the things that God hates. Therefore, this would be a good barometer on how God's transforming your heart to be like His. If you continue to struggle with an attraction toward evil sinful things in this world, then make it a matter of prayer that God would cause your heart to become alive to those things which are good and praiseworthy. *The greatest way to resist the allure of evil is to become more and more enamored by God.* So, my recommendation would be to try to focus less on the evil things you're drawn to and more on the *goodness and greatness of God.* Even keep a notebook of the things that you're in wonder every day about God. And this discipline will train your heart and mind to keep your focus on God. It's like Paul's instructions in Philippians 4:8 *"Finally, brothers and sisters, 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."* That is a great list of things worth thinking about and training your mind to pursue.
3. *"A spiritual leader must be a person who is self-controlled."* They don't live their lives out of control but they consciously let God have control of their lives. People attempt to do this in all sorts of creative ways. They get daily planners and fill them out. They carve out times for morning or evening devotions. They set short term and long term goals for themselves and their families and the various areas of their lives. They take seminars on how to maximize their time. Those are all really good suggestions. But no doubt the very best strategy is to turn your life completely over to the control of the Holy Spirit and allow him to take control of your life. **Galatians 5:16-19 (NIV)** *So I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. 17 For the flesh desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the flesh. They are in conflict with each other, so that you are not to do whatever you want. 18 But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law.* Let me ask you: "Who or what is controlling your life right now."
4. *"upright, holy and disciplined"* I think these three all flow out of living a life of self-control. Of allowing the Holy Spirit to lead your life in every area. You live differently than the rest of the world. You live fully realizing that your identity has changed as a result of committing to following Jesus. That you now have different priorities and desires and goals. You realize that God is changing your heart day by day and that you're not just another human being eking out an existence day by day and trying to pay the bills. But you are a *chosen child of God*, with *citizenship in heaven* but sent out into the world to be an *ambassador*. To show God's light and love to others. And so you, understanding this new identity, you're careful to be the very best child of God you can be. You don't want to do anything that would discredit your witness and certainly don't want to do anything that would discredit Christ's body, the church or bring dishonor to God.

5. *He must hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been taught, so that he can encourage others by sound doctrine and refute those who oppose it.* Church leaders must be committed to knowing God's Word, they must study it and learn it so that they can protect the church body from any false teachers that might try to creep in and also to use God's Word to encourage those within the body.

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1. An elders must be _____
2. Faithful to his _____
3. A man whose children _____ and are not open to the charge of being _____ and _____
4. He must _____ not _____
5. Not _____
6. Not given to _____
7. Not pursuing dishonest _____

1. He must be _____
2. He must love what is _____
3. He must be _____ - _____
4. He must be _____, _____ and _____
5. He must hold firmly to the trustworthy _____ as it mas been taught, so that he can _____ others by sound doctrine and _____ those who oppose it.

Applying God's Word:

Who has been an influential leader in your life?

What impact did they have on you?

Who are you a leader to?

What areas of your life is God currently working on?

What areas of your life are you still withholding from God?

Why are you refusing to turn those areas over to Him?

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