

Main Idea: Leaders in the church must be shaped by the gospel in all of life..

Titus 1:5–9 (ESV)

⁵ 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— ⁶ if anyone is above reproach, the husband of one wife, and his children are believers and not open to the charge of debauchery or insubordination. ⁷ 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, ⁸ but hospitable, a lover of good, self-controlled, upright, holy, and disciplined. ⁹ 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.

What Makes a Good Leader?

Often we think of someone who communicates well. Someone who has charisma that people want to follow. Someone who gets the job done and can motivate people. Maybe someone who delegates well. I googled this question and found all sorts of results—10 Qualities of a Good Leader—7 Traits of a Good Leader—8 Must-Have Qualities of an Effective Leader—9 Critical Leadership Qualities. I don't know how many there actually are. Here's a variation on the question. What makes a good **church** leader? What kind of characteristics should we be looking for in church leaders? Our text today deals with this very question.

It's been a while since we've been in Titus together. So...a few things to remember. Titus is short. Only 3 chapters. 46 verses in the ESV. It is 1 of the 3 books known as the pastoral epistles, the other 2 being the letters to Timothy.

2 Timothy 2:2 (ESV)

² and what you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men, who will be able to teach others also.

Both Timothy and Titus were faithful men that Paul had entrusted with the gospel. And he calls them both to find other faithful men to entrust with the gospel, who can then continue this pattern of gospel discipling. These 3 letters deal with how the church is supposed to function and operate. Titus in particular deals with how the gospel leads to godliness.

In v. 1-4, which was the first sermon in this series, Paul summed up the major themes in the letter by highlighting what it looks like to be gospel-shaped people. I summed up the whole theme of Titus this way: God's grace revealed in the gospel leads to godliness in the lives of his people. We saw this theme highlighted in v.1-4. Coming right out of that theologically packed intro, Paul gets right down to the details of Titus' mission. Which brings us to our text for today.

Titus 1:5 (ESV)

⁵ This is why I left you in Crete, so that you might put what remained into order,

At this point, you might expect to find the programs that Titus should start. Or the processes and structures that he should institute. After all, he is to “put what remained into order” (v.5). But that’s not what we find. Instead, we find a particular way in which he is to bring things to order in the churches in Crete. He is to...“*appoint elders in every town*” (v.5) as Paul had directed him.

Which was no small task, mind you. Crete was a large island (over 3,000 square miles) with a lot of cities.¹ The only way to ensure that the gospel remained central was to appoint leaders in every town who could guard the gospel and refute false teachers. Which brings us back to the main idea again: **Leaders in the church must be shaped by the gospel in all of life.** But it begs the question, what kind of leaders? All kinds of leaders in the church? I think a case can be made for that, and we’ll get to that later on. But specifically here we’re talking about elders (v.5).

What is an Elder?

While we may be less familiar with the term, the Bible uses it quite a bit to refer to those who lead in the church. But not just anyone who leads. Those who are formally appointed to lead in a public way in the church. Those who assume responsibility for the spiritual care of others. Those who are called on by the church to shepherd God’s flock.

The terms **elder** (v.5), **overseer** (v.7), and **pastor** (which isn’t in this text) are all used interchangeably throughout the New Testament to refer to the same church leaders (Acts 20:28; 1 Peter 5:1-2; Acts 14:23; 20:17; Philipians 1:1; 1 Timothy 4:14; James 5:14; Hebrews 13:17). The New Testament seems to show a pattern of a plurality of elders. So while it doesn’t anywhere require that there be more than one elder/overseer/pastor, it certainly seems like that was the pattern. Here’s another way to put it...elders/overseers/pastors are church leaders divinely appointed by a local church to publicly lead that local church.

Here’s a clarification, and maybe an elephant in the room that you don’t even know is in the room...the Bible restricts the office of elder/overseer/pastor to only men. Probably the most direct passage regarding this is...

1 Timothy 2:11–14 (ESV)

¹¹ Let a woman learn quietly with all submissiveness. ¹² I do not permit a woman to teach or to exercise authority over a man; rather, she is to remain quiet. ¹³ For Adam was formed first, then Eve; ¹⁴ and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor.

Paul roots his command in the creation order of male headship. Both men and women are made in the image of God and have equal value and worth. Equal in value, yes. Equal in role and responsibility, no. Just as fathers hold a distinct leadership role in the life of the family. So, men hold a distinct leadership role in the life of the church. And there’s more we could say on that, but not for today. Which brings us back to the main idea once again: **Leaders in the church must be shaped by the gospel in all of life.**

As Paul aims for Titus to set things in order, what kind of characteristics should Titus look for in those who will be appointed as elders/overseers/pastors to publicly lead the church? In this text, we can see 3 patterns that are present in the life of gospel-shaped leaders...

1. They orient their families around the gospel (v.5-6)
2. They exemplify character fueled by the gospel (v.7-8)
3. They disciple others with the gospel (v.9)

Three Warnings

Warning #1: Don't Tune Out

You might already be tuning me out. You're like...I'm not a leader. I don't want to be a leader. Maybe you're a woman and you're thinking...this doesn't apply to me. There really isn't anything here for me. Even if that were true (which it's not—we'll see in Titus 2 that all of us are to be leading people to follow Jesus in some way). But even if that were true, you still need to know what kind of leaders are supposed to be leading the church! It is part of your responsibility to guard the gospel here. And that means knowing whether or not the leaders here are faithful to the gospel. Whether or not these things are true of our lives.

As leaders, we can't just say we believe right doctrine. It has to show up in the way we live. It has to saturate our lives. This makes this sermon a little bit tough to preach. I'm putting myself on display for scrutiny here. But such is the nature of the office according to the Bible. It comes with the territory.

Warning #2: Not Checkboxes

Resist the temptation to see these characteristics as a list of things to check off. We find a similar list in 1 Timothy 3, but there are enough differences to let us know that these aren't absolute rigid characteristics. These aren't checkboxes that are black and white. These are patterns of life that accord with godliness. Patterns that exhibit faithfulness. And you'll notice as we go, they are patterns that should be true of all followers of Jesus. So that is another reason to pay attention here and not zone out.

Warning #3: Not a Career

The NT doesn't indicate anywhere that elder/overseer/pastor is primarily a vocation. I think sometimes we are so prone to thinking of "pastor" as a job, that it's hard to think outside of the paid ministry paradigm. Any man who meets the biblical qualifications can be appointed to lead in the church. Regardless of his vocation. In fact, there ought to be many more men in the church who meet these qualifications than could possibly be paid to do the work of an elder. The Bible knows nothing of a distinction between two classes of Christians—those who lead and those who don't. We've made those categories up. Let's not view this passage as only for a select few people in the church.

Gospel-Shaped Leaders Orient Their Families Around the Gospel

Titus 1:5–6 (ESV)

⁵ *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—* ⁶ *if anyone is above reproach, the husband of one wife, and his children are believers and not open to the charge of debauchery or insubordination.*

We've already said that Titus' mission was to "put what remained in to order" and to do that by "appoint[ing] elders in every town" as Paul had directed (v.5) As we move into v. 6, there is an abrupt grammar shift. But I think it serves to make the connection between leading well at home and leading well in the church that is coming in v.7. Paul uses the term "above reproach" as an overarching characteristic. Other translations use the word "blameless." He'll mention it again in v.7. It doesn't mean that the leader is perfect. It can't mean that, because no one is perfect. We all sin. Church leaders will sin. I will sin against you. If I haven't yet, just wait. We're human, so we sin. We sin because we're sinners.

So what does "blameless" or "above reproach" mean? I think Tim Chester explains it well... "Blameless [means] to have a good reputation, against which an accusation cannot be made."² If an accusation is made, it doesn't stick. Nothing in the life of the leader detracts from the gospel or compromises his witness. On the contrary, the elder's life commends the gospel. Then he goes on to highlight 2 particular areas in which the elder must be blameless: marriage and parenting.

The phrase "husband of one wife" (v.6) has stirred up quite a bit of debate, and my purpose this morning is not to settle that. It is literally "one-woman man." The NIV says "faithful to his wife." He orients his marriage around the gospel when he loves his wife like Christ loves the church (Ephesians 5:25). The marriage of the gospel-shaped leader points people to the reality of the gospel because of his faithfulness in that relationship. It doesn't seem to be requiring marriage. In fact, it doesn't seem to be referring to marital status at all. If the elder is married, being above reproach means being faithful to his wife. Remember, this isn't a list item to be checked off, as much as it is a posture of a faithful heart.

We see that in the next qualification too... "his children are believers and not open to the charge of debauchery or insubordination" (v.6). Does this mean that church leaders must have children and they must be saved? I don't think it can mean that. I don't have any control over whether or not my children experience the new birth. I don't have the ability to force God to save them, or to verify that the new birth has indeed happened.

Here's what I can do... I can orient my family around the gospel so that my children grow up in a Christian house where the gospel is both spoken and lived. A house where the gospel is both taught and modeled. Grace is the heartbeat and repentance is the posture. Forgiveness flows freely. I can't make choices for my kids, but I can show them which choices are right. Overseeing a grace-filled, gospel-driven household is the best thing I can do for my family. And it's the best thing I can do for our church, God's family. The elder who orients his family around the gospel will orient God's family around the gospel as well.

Every single one of us that has a family ought to be orienting them around the gospel. Regardless of whether or not we are church leaders. Men, we take the lead in this because of our God-given responsibility. How would you describe your household today? Grace-filled and gospel-driven? Or condemnation-filled and selfishly-driven? It can be relatively easy to orient our family's life around everything but the gospel. Football. Game nights. Family dinner. School activities. Even other people. All good things. But do we talk about Jesus with our kids? Are we leading them to see how the gospel affects all of life? Do we know how the gospel affects all of life? It has been almost 4 years since I

experienced my second Achilles tendon rupture. That was something that affected every aspect of my life. From just getting off the couch to driving to simply standing, I had to consider how that injury changed how I approached life for that season. The gospel is like that for Christians, except even more pervasive.

Gospel-Shaped Leaders Exemplify Character Fueled by the Gospel

Titus 1:7–8 (ESV)

⁷ 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, ⁸ but hospitable, a lover of good, self-controlled, upright, holy, and disciplined.

The language switches to overseer, which we've already seen is referring to the same leader as elder and pastor. The elder as God's steward points to the connection between his family and God's family. A steward is someone who manages what another owns. The gospel-shaped leader is God's steward, who must again be above reproach. In case we missed that the first time. Paul lays out 5 traits that must not characterize church leaders, and then 6 traits that must characterize them.

Godly leaders **must not** be..

- Arrogant - overbearing and selfish
- Quick-tempered - can't control emotions
- A Drunkard - ruled by alcohol
- Violent - emotionally or physically bullying
- Greedy for Gain - pursuits driven by selfishness

Godly leaders **must** be..

- Hospitable - open-hearted towards people
- Lover of good - clear theme in Titus—embody what is good
- Self-controlled - evidence of maturity
- Upright - righteous
- Holy - set apart
- Disciplined - overall characteristic, loops back to self-control

Again, this is not a checklist. There are no mysterious leadership secrets here. The general sense is respectable. Credible. Faithful. Conduct and character that is visible in the life of the leader. But gospel-fueled character isn't just for pastors and church leaders. These characteristics that must be true of an elder should also be true of anyone who follows Jesus. We could go to countless passages, but for sake of example, here are some references you can jot down (1 Peter 4:9; Romans 12:13; Philippians 4:8; Romans 12:9; Titus 2:2; 2:5; 2:12; James 5:16; Colossians 3:12; 1 Peter 1:15; Galatians 5:23; 1 Corinthians 9:27). Elders are not another class of Christians with their own set of standards. They are to be examples of what faithful Christianity looks like. How else could they teach someone else what it means to follow Jesus?

I think about coaching. When I first started playing basketball, I was basketball illiterate. I barely knew how to get the ball in the hoop. I had some good coaches that taught me all sorts of things. After lots of practice, I had a plan for how I was going to score in basically any

situation. And even keep the opponent from scoring. But those coaches didn't just tell me what to do. They showed me how to do it. Here, let me show you what it looks like to ball fake, get your man off his feet, then lean in for the shot and draw the foul.

Elders/overseers/pastors are to show us—by their example—what it looks like to follow Jesus. A word to the men in the church—is the Spirit prompting you to pursue leadership in the church? Perhaps you aspire to do the work of elder/overseer/pastor. According to 1 Tim. 3:1, whoever aspires to be an overseer desires a noble work. But you don't have to change vocations. Seek to be blameless in your character and conduct. Be faithful to your wife if you're married. If you have kids, lead them with the gospel. Be an example of gospel-fueled character that makes Jesus look good. Model repentance when your own sin smacks you in the face. Shepherd those within your influence.

God may see fit to open the door for you to be formally appointed in the church. But even if that never happens—your wife will be loved well. Your kids will be led well. The people around you will be cared for. The gospel will bring life to your relationships. This church will be strengthened. God will be glorified. Gospel-shaped leaders exemplify character fueled by the gospel.

Gospel-Shaped Leaders Disciple Others with the Gospel

Titus 1:9 (ESV)

⁹ 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.

This verse wraps up the qualifications of an elder that Paul highlights here. It shifts the emphasis from the elder's character to the elder's work. To be sure, there is more work that elders must do. But there is not any work of more primary importance than this, and all other work that the elder does flows from this: He must hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught (v.9). Hold firm means "be devoted to" or give himself entirely to it. What is he devoted to? What is he giving himself entirely to? What is he holding firm?

The trustworthy word as taught. The Gospel! God, the holy and righteous Creator, made humanity in his image to be in relationship with him. Mankind, the sinner—we are alienated from God because of our rebellion against God, and we are subject to his wrath. Sin separates us from God. It ultimately damns us to eternal punishment without God. You and I can't do anything about this. Enter Jesus! God the Son lived a sinless life, died on a cross and took all of God's wrath as a substitute for those who would believe in Him, and was raised to life again to give his people eternal life.

This is really good news! The right response to this good news is repentance and faith. Repentance is turning from your sin. Faith is trusting in Christ alone to save you from your sin problem. The only other response to this news is rejection. Deep down you know you are deeply marred by sin. Are you rejecting the good news of salvation by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone? Salvation that comes not by anything you have done or can do. But only by the finished work of Christ's life, death and resurrection. If you are rejecting this news today, I plead with you not to persist in your rejection. Repent and believe this gospel!

Paul had already called attention to this gospel of grace in v.1-4. Later on in Titus, we see this truth beautifully expressed...

Titus 2:11–14 (ESV)

¹¹ For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, ¹² training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age, ¹³ waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, ¹⁴ who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works.

This is the trustworthy word that has been taught to Titus. To which he is to hold firm and teach others to hold firm. There are two reasons that Paul gives for the elder to hold firm to the gospel...so that he may be able “to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict it” (sound doctrine).

What is sound doctrine? On a simple level, it's the gospel. On a deeper level, it's everything the Bible says to be true. I like Bobby Jamieson's definition...“Sound doctrine is a summary of the Bible's teaching that is both faithful to the Bible and useful for life.”³

2 Peter 1:3 (ESV)

³ His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence,

Sound doctrine is simply what the Bible says is true. We'll talk more about sound doctrine in Titus 2. Elders are to both give instruction in it—encourage others with sound teaching and rebuke those who contradict it—call out false teaching and practices that do not align with the gospel. False teaching is like gangrene, eating away at the body. It damages and eventually destroys the body of Christ. Sound doctrine is like medicine that brings health and life to the body. It helps the body of Christ avoid disease and grow in health for the glory of God.

This is equivalent to the qualification in 1 Timothy 3:2 that an elder be “able to teach.” Teaching does not just mean standing up in front of a class and publicly speaking. Teaching includes conversations over dinner and 1-on-1 meetings. It means elders can explain sound doctrine in a way that helps people grow and confronts those who are going astray. This is the distinguishing mark that is unique to elders. Not that others can't teach, or shouldn't teach, but elders must be able to teach. To disciple people with sound doctrine.

Here is a question for you that has the potential to indict me. Preaching the whole counsel of God means sometimes we indict ourselves. At the very least we must call ourselves to account. Do we as leaders disciple you with the gospel? Are you more encouraged to rely on Christ because of how we lead? Are you more enamored with the gospel now than you were before? Are you more in love with Jesus? Are we leading you to gospel freedom, gospel belief, gospel repentance, gospel hope?

Do we disciple you with the gospel? If you haven't thought about that before, it's time to start thinking about it. If you have thought about it, and your conclusion is that we don't do that, your next step is to prayerfully bring that to our attention and start a conversation with us. We

have to be the kind of leaders that can accept correction when needed. Gospel-shaped leaders are characterized by sound doctrine. It's how they live and how they lead. They disciple others with the gospel, not their own wisdom, or the world's wisdom.

If you're not shaped by the gospel, you'll be shaped by something else. In order to be gospel-shaped people, we need gospel-shaped leaders. Gospel-shaped leaders are critical for the health and well-being of God's church. They are critical for our growth in godliness.

¹Yarbrough, Robert W. *The Letters to Timothy and Titus*. Edited by D. A. Carson. Pillar New Testament Commentary. Grand Rapids, MI; London: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company; Apollos, 2018.

²Chester, Tim. *Titus for You*. (p.31)

³Jamieson, Bobby. *Sound Doctrine*. (p.17)