

The Marks Of Godly Leadership

Titus 1:5-16

Sept. 12, 2021

In preparation for this sermon, as with any sermon, I consulted with a number of resources.

Some of the commentary was massively convicting.

Alistair Begg asserts:

“Every problem in the local church can be traced back to defective leadership.” [R]

Ouch.

In recent months, the leadership of St. Andrew’s Kirk has identified some specific weaknesses within our ministry.

There are some gaps.

There are some things we need to be better at.

According to Begg, the leadership of St. Andrew's Kirk ought not to look beyond itself for an explanation for our shortcomings.

As I diagnose certain deficiencies with our offering of ministries, I need to make sure that I begin by looking in the mirror.

I can neither absolve myself, nor can I distance myself, from our shortcomings.

"Every problem in the local church can be traced back to defective leadership."

Begg also asserts:

"No organization will rise above the level of its leadership." [R]

I am fond of describing the wonderful ways in which the ministry of St. Andrew's Kirk has expanded, and matured, from where we were in 2010.

The very first time I attended worship at the Kirk—when I was a candidate for the position of Senior Pastor—there were no more than 40 people in attendance that Sunday.

There was a children's story on the platform steps that Sunday and the 3 children in attendance came forward.

Within a few short years we experienced meaningful growth in just about every aspect of ministry.

In 2014 we received the prestigious *Bart Hess Award* from our denomination, recognizing our revitalization and innovation with ministry.

But some point between 2018 and the onset of the global pandemic, we hit a wall, as it were.

We plateaued.

We plateaued pre-pandemic, so I can't blame COVID-19.

COVID-19 might be the primary reason we are currently unable to emerge from the plateau, but I don't think it is the reason for the plateau.

“No organization will rise above the level of its leadership.”

I take this to heart.

As we examine Paul’s instruction to Titus, and as he details the character of godly church leadership, I want you to know that I preach this sermon to myself before I preach it to any of you.

Nevertheless, this is an important sermon for every Christ follower to give careful attention to.

For church officers (elders and deacons), and church leaders (Sunday School teachers, small group leaders), we are reminded of the things, which ought to mark our conduct.

For everyone else, it is helpful for you to be familiar with God’s standard for leadership within the local church.

I am also certain that among us are *future* church officers and leaders...And so, for you, Paul’s instruction is preparatory.

Paul begins, **“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”** (1:5).

The pattern of appointing elders for local congregations is what we observe in the Book of Acts, and it is what Paul prescribes for Titus and the congregations in Crete.

The Greek word for **“elders”** is *“presbuteros”*, from which we get the word “Presbyterian”.

A Presbyterian Church then is a congregation governed by elders.

Paul wants Titus to know that *there are particular character traits that must be discerned in a person before they are appointed as an elder.*

Before we wade through this list of characteristics we will be helped if we note *what is missing* from the list.

Nowhere does Paul make *formal education* a prerequisite for eldership.

While there may be advantages to having elders that possess Masters degrees, or even PhDs, formal education is never listed as a requirement for church leadership.

Nor is *business acumen*.

I have observed many congregations over the years seek out persons to be elders who have managed successful businesses and have enjoyed a measure of worldly success.

Paul doesn't mention anything even close to business success as being a qualification for eldership.

Nor is there any reference to *longevity within the community* as a qualification.

You don't have Paul saying, "Dear Titus, have you determined who has been in Crete the longest? What you really need is someone whom everyone is familiar with, and who knows the lay of the land."

If not education...if not business acumen...if not longevity—what is required?

Is it the *most personable and popular*?

Should we be looking to appoint persons to eldership that are considered the “nicest” within the congregation?

No.

While church elders should certainly aspire to be personable and kind, these are not the primary traits to be looking for.

Let’s have a look at what Paul does prescribe for Titus as he looks to appoint elders in Crete.

Verse 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.”**

First, we have the requirement of being **“above reproach”**—a requirement that is repeated in verse 7.

To be “**above reproach**” cannot mean “sinless”, for then no one would qualify for church leadership.

The Greek term is a technical word meaning, “not chargeable with some offense” (Hughes and Chapell, *1-2 Timothy & Titus*, 321).

To be “**above reproach**” relates to a person’s reputation within the wider community—it is to say that there is no glaring, external, aspect of the person’s life, which marks them as a person of disrepute.

Paul then goes on to provide several specific examples.

The prescription of “**the husband of one wife**” (1:6) is a frequently misunderstood statement.

We help ourselves by remembering that Paul was not married when he wrote this and, as best as we can tell, Titus was not other.

Being married then, is *not* a requirement for church leadership.

Nor is marital history what is being referenced here.

Again, what we have here is a technical phrase, which literally means “a one-woman man”.

The phrase is focused on a husband’s devotion and faithfulness to his wife.

A spouse, whose posture within marriage can be described in these terms, is someone who isn’t guilty of recent or serial infidelity.

We sometimes hear of a high-ranking member of government who is said to be engaged in a marital affair.

And the response of those who would defend the person usually sounds something like this:

“What that person does in their personal life is not relevant to how they do their job.”

As it relates to government, we can debate that another day...

But what Paul makes clear to Titus is that *what a person does in their personal life is extremely relevant as it pertains to fitness for church leadership.*

According to Paul, the state of a person's household is hugely relevant as it relates to qualifying for church leadership.

Paul describes church leaders saying, **“his children are believers and not open to the charge of debauchery or insubordination”** (1:6).

The term Paul uses for **children** is **“tekna”**, and generally relates to children living within the home (Hughes and Chapell, *1-2 Timothy & Titus*, 325).

Secondly, the word Paul uses is plural, which suggests that an assessment shouldn't focus on one particular child but is considering the character of the family as a whole.

This lines up closely with how Paul instructs Timothy on this subject, saying that a church elder should “**manage his own household well**” (1Tim. 3:4).

As we wade into verse 7, Paul presents 5 characteristics that are framed in the negative followed by 6 positive characteristics.

In the interest of time, I’m going to move quickly through these 11...

A church leader “**must not be arrogant**”.

Few of us would describe ourselves as “**arrogant**”, but the word literally translates “pleasing himself”.

This is a person who thinks of their own needs before considering the needs of others.

“**Not...quick-tempered**”

This word has a connection to flammability.

All of us experience occasions when something is done that we disapprove of, or something is done that agitates our spirit...

When this happens to the “**quick-tempered**” person, they lash out in an outward manner.

This is not how leaders in the local church are to be marked.

“**Not...a drunkard**”

While this is a clear example of how overindulging with alcohol is inappropriate, the phrase was common to Paul’s day for describing any outrageous, or reckless, behaviour.

“**Not...violent**”

Other translations have rendered this, “**not a striker**”.

While a physical blow is clearly wrong, the phrase would also apply to a verbal strike—and to any attempt to harm another.

“**Not...greedy for gain**”

A church leader must never use their office to take advantage of another person, or to improve their personal situation.

Now we move to the positive qualities, which ought to mark church leaders...

“Hospitable”

The hospitable person is not the person who most frequently has their friends over for dinner.

Biblical hospitality always emphasizes providing for the visitor and the stranger.

Biblical hospitality is always sacrificial in nature.

A church leader ought to be **“a lover of good”**.

The phrase points particularly to the good of others.

In the same way a parent says to their child, “I want what is best for you” and then works to this end, so too a church leader wants what is best for God’s people and works to that end.

A church leader ought to be “**self-controlled**”.

This is the flipside to a few of the “ought nots”.

A self-controlled person is not an impulsive person and will not be given to lashing out or to overindulging.

A church leader ought to be “**upright**” and “**holy**”.

These two characteristics are similar in their connection to God’s law and standard for righteousness.

The leader in the local church is someone who strives to conform to the standards, and live within the boundaries, that God has set out in His Word.

And finally, a church leader ought to be “**disciplined**”.

This term describes *the manner* in which a person strives to be godly.

The pursuit of godliness is a rigorous pursuit.

This is the word that is used to describe an athlete in training.

In the context of the local church, however, our **disciplined** striving to be **upright** and **holy** is not merely for our personal sanctification.

Church leaders strive to be marked in particular ways because it will benefit the wider body of believers.

How church leaders behave...how church leaders order their lives...will have a profound affect on those they seek to shepherd.

We must not settle for mediocrity.

It's not appropriate to set the standard at just above the average.

I agree with Alistair Begg's assessment:

“No organization will rise above the level of its leadership.”

Paul is clearly holding church leadership to a different, higher, standard.

The Bible holds the leadership of every local church to a different, higher, standard.

And our striving to maintain the standard isn't merely for ourselves...

We strive to meet God's standard for the benefit of others.

We strive for holiness to elevate those around us.

We strive by the power of the Holy Spirit—in Jesus' name and for His sake.

Amen.