

The Marks of Spiritual Leadership

Titus 1:5 – 9

Fairview Presbyterian Church

February 12, 2017

The Christian life is an ordered life

⁵This 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

Paul left Titus in Crete in order to get things organized. One of the marks of Christian religion is that it is ordered, organized, stable, methodical, disciplined, regular, and dependable. Leaders in God's church are to establish things and put them in order so that the faith may be passed on to the next generation. As we learn from this verse from the apostle Paul, the people who are responsible for this task, are the elders.

The appointment of elders as spiritual leaders among God's people is an ancient practice. In Exodus 18, we read of how Moses, following the advice of his father-in-law Jethro, established a system of elder leadership among the ancient Israelites. Elder led leadership of God's people is a long established practice. At the time of the New Testament, leadership within the Jewish synagogues was exercised by a team of elders. Paul is following the example of what he has seen.

We are Presbyterians. The name, Presbyterian, is derived from the Greek word for *elder*, presbytereos. The elders were the presbyters of the congregation. They were the leaders in the congregation. In v. 5 Paul refers to presbytereos. In v. 7 he uses a second word for spiritual leaders within the church, episcopos, meaning *overseer* or *superintendent*. It is from this second Greek word that we get the word *bishop*. It seems clear that the organization of the earliest churches was quite simple. Most scholars agree that, at the time of Paul's writing, episcopos and presbytereos were synonyms, simply referring to the spiritual leaders of a local congregation. But things change. Over time, as the number of churches grew, and the faith spread, as the number of individual congregations increased, so too did the church's organizational structure. Eventually, a distinction was made between an elder, who exercised spiritual authority locally, at the congregational level, and a bishop, who oversaw a number of churches scattered over a wider geographical area.

This is not the right context to compare and contrast the various ways in which the churches of this world organize themselves today—though it is an intriguing study. Instead, let me say some brief words about how we Presbyterians are organized. Within a local Presbyterian Church, such as Fairview Evangelical Presbyterian Church, we have three forms of officers: elders, deacons and trustees. Trustees perform an important role in the life of the church, but a trustee is not, technically, a spiritual office. In the modern world

churches are legal corporate entities. The trustees of a church are those who are the legal representatives of the church under the laws of a particular state and nation.

Deacons are a spiritual office of practical ministry to those in need. You can find the story of the institution of deacons as a church office in Acts 6. Within a Presbyterian church the ministry of the Deacon's Board may vary quite significantly from one local Presbyterian Church to the next. Basically, the Deacon's job is to find a need and fill it: and needs vary significantly from one community to another.

Elders within a Presbyterian Church are charged with spiritual authority within the congregation. The Session is the governing board of a local Presbyterian church. The elders serving on the Session are said to be *ruling elders*. The pastor of the church is a *teaching elder*. Among the primary responsibilities of my job as pastor is to teach and instruct the people of Fairview Evangelical Presbyterian Church regarding the message of the gospel and the content of the historic faith. In a Presbyterian Church, both elders and deacons are formally and officially set apart to the task of spiritual leadership through ordination and the laying on of hands.

Titus had a challenging task before him. There were a hundred different cities on the island of Crete. We do not know how many churches were planted, but presumably it was more than a few. In addition, Crete was not considered a particularly fertile ground for finding moral and spiritual leadership. The Cretans were reputed to be scoundrels in business and ruthless in war. Later in this opening chapter, Paul himself quotes a Cretan prophet as saying, "Cretans are always liars, evil beasts, lazy gluttons." Apparently Titus was a man who liked a challenge.

For these reasons, it is not surprising that Paul touches upon some of the key qualities that are to be looked for when setting apart spiritual leaders. Titus must winnow the wheat from the chaff, the good from the bad. Let's look at the standards Paul applies in evaluating one's readiness for spiritual leadership.

The first thing we note is that the proving ground for church leadership is within the family.

The standard of Christian leadership is life above reproach

⁶ if anyone is above reproach,

We live in a world that rejects, challenges, and pushes back against the traditional standards of morality as lifted up and affirmed in Christian faith and teaching. I am saddened by this reality. It makes life challenging. But this is the world where God has placed us. The world around us may reject standards of morality, but we still affirm them. Paul speaks of living life above reproach. It is

important to remember that Paul speaks of this standard of living above reproach, not to folk living in a monastery, but to folk living on the island of Crete during the Roman Empire. He is speaking to a world that is much like our own. As Christians, we live our lives against the grain. The world seeks to push back against moral standards. In the church, we lift them up and declare the good that they encompass.

In the modern world, when we advertise a job opening, it is typical to list minimum requirements. These are the floor skills needed to even be considered eligible for the position. They may include educational levels achieved; foreign language skills; competency in specific computer programming skills; the possession of state issued licenses; and so on. Meeting minimum requirements does not mean you will get the job advertised. It just means that you are qualified to be considered for the position.

In these verses that follow, Paul speaks of the minimum requirements to be considered eligible for spiritual leadership within Christ's church. These three prerequisites revolve around how one manages one's household. A Christian believer's first duty is to one's own home. There is nothing surprising in this. In general, church leaders are to be examples. The proving ground for indicating that a person is ready for the responsibilities of church leadership is the family. Show success there and a person is eligible to be a leader in the church. I am the teaching elder of Fairview Evangelical Presbyterian Church. That said, you know that Fairview is not my number one priority in life. My first duty is to God. My second is to Lois Ann. Third come my children and their families. Fairview is fourth on the list. My first spiritual duty is to my family.

I also know that as I walk through these criteria, some will find their minds raisings questions as to possible exceptions. Are these criteria hard and fast, are they inviolable? Where do adult singles fit in these guidelines? Is spiritual leadership reserved only for men? Can the divorced serve in positions of leadership. These are important questions. They are also beyond the scope of today's message. I intend to focus on what Paul says about the guidelines he is giving to Titus. Let us firmly establish the principles before we begin exploring the possibilities of exceptions.

The first of the three prerequisites Paul lists is that a Christian leader must be faithful in marriage.

A Christian leader is faithful in marriage

the husband of one wife,

Marriage plays a key role in God's purposes on earth. Marriage is woven by God into creation. In Genesis 2, it is the presentation of Eve to Adam that prompts the first recorded human sentences. Adam's words are poetry:

“This *is* now bone of my bones
And flesh of my flesh;
She shall be called Woman,
Because she was taken out of Man.”

Marriage is the basic building block of human relationships and human community. As Genesis puts, ²⁴ Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh. The Lord Jesus blessed marriage in his presence at the wedding at Cana. The New Testament uses the reality of marriage as a metaphor of a Christian’s relationship to Jesus Christ. Christ is the groom and the Church is his bride.

It is our lot to live in an age when this particular standard is under constant attack. But again, the world may do as it pleases. We, as God’s people, understand the value and place of marriage in our lives and in our communities, and in our nation.

This is Paul’s first prerequisite: faithful in marriage. The second: a Christian leader raises children in the faith.

A Christian leader raises children in the faith
and his children are believers

Christianity begins at home. The home is the primary sphere of disciple making. In affirming this we are following the instruction of Deuteronomy 6.

⁶ “And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart. ⁷ You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up. ⁸ You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. ⁹ You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.

We are called to train our children in the faith primarily by talking with our children about the faith. Faith is a family affair. In the early church it was expected that leaders in the church must first convert the members of their household to Christian faith before they could be considered for higher offices of responsibility. The family is our primary field of evangelism. Moms and dads, we have a God-given responsibility to raise the little barbarians God has entrusted to our care from infancy into honorable faithful adulthood. Doing so is not an easy matter. It takes continuing prayer, conversation, effort and attention. This is the positive application of this expectation laid by Paul.

On the negative side is the recognition that there is no virtue in sacrificing a home, a family or one’s relationships with one’s children upon the altar of ministry. It is a sad fact that some elders, pastors, missionaries and other church

leaders pursue their religious calling at the expense of their families. Ministry is never an excuse for God's leaders to neglect their family.

This is Paul's first prerequisite: faithful in marriage. The second: a Christian leader raises children in the faith. Third: a Christian raises his children into honorable faithful adulthood.

A Christian leader raises his children into honorable faithful adulthood

and not open to the charge of debauchery or insubordination.

I often talk about the challenge and need to raise our children into honorable, faithful, adulthood. It is important to include both adjectives: honorable and faithful. In the previous verse, Paul's emphasis fell upon the importance of passing the faith on to our children. We want our children to believe as we do. That is why we teach the catechisms and offer Confirmation. We raise our children to be Christian, Presbyterian, and Reformed in their thinking. Ours is a much higher calling than merely raising "spiritual" children. Having solid, right theology is a great blessing as we face the challenges of adulthood. We seek to raise children who know the Bible, who understand the faith, who confess faith in Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior.

But Paul adds a second qualifier. Our children are to believe, he tells us, but also they should be honorable, not open to the charge of debauchery or insubordination. The fifth commandment tells us that we are to "honor our mother and our father." This is part of honorable adulthood. This is a high standard. It is not enough to raise our children to believe in Jesus. It is not enough to turn them loose upon the world when they turn eighteen, or graduate from high school, or from college. The calling is to raise our children to take their place in honorable adulthood, in all its fullness.

We are to train our children in virtue. The Greek philosopher Aristotle taught that the essence of a virtue was to find the mean between two extremes. In this example, Aristotle would point to the one extreme of stinginess, someone who is miserly; and to the other extreme of profligacy. The between point of the two is liberality: being generous where generosity is called for and being frugal where frugality is the goal.

This is Paul's first prerequisite: faithful in marriage. The second: a Christian leader raises children in the faith. Third: a Christian raises his children into honorable faithful adulthood.

Next, Paul returns to a theme he has already touched upon: God's leaders are to be above reproach.

God's leaders should be above reproach

⁷ For an overseer, as God's steward, must be above reproach.

As stated earlier, we Christians are to live by higher standard than the world around us. We do not seek to simply get by, we seek to live our lives honorably. To further fill this idea out, Paul now begins to list traits that should not be found among God's leaders. The first: they should not be arrogant.

Things God's leaders are not:

He must not be arrogant

Jesus Christ is the head of the church. Our primary loyalty is to him. But, Jesus Christ is not physically present in our midst giving instruction, direction and guidance to our efforts in his name. This creates the practical reality that the church is a cooperative affair. It is a team effort. An elder is not a Lone Ranger.

One who is arrogant is obstinate or stubborn and shows contempt for other's opinions and perspectives. He sees no way but his own. He is careless of other's feelings. He is intolerant of others, especially those with whom he may disagree.

There is a balance to be pursued in this. The scriptures teach that as iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another. It is in God's methodology that we learn from one another. And it is in God's purposes that we grow in learning to work with one another. There is a place for competition and disagreements in life. We must be willing to make allowances for one another.

As you know, in 2016 I served as the moderator of the Presbytery of the East. In addition to moderating the presbytery's meetings, I also moderated the executive council, the leadership team that planned and prepared for each presbytery meeting. Several times this past year we experienced substantive, serious, and sometimes emotional disagreements over various matters. That's life. Humans have to work hard learning to get along with one another.

Paul is saying that an elder must be a man who knows how to balance such things. One who is open to listening and learning. One who knows that he does not yet know it all. Yes, there are some things in life and in our faith in which compromise is not a virtue. But in most things there must be a give and take in life.

We do not appoint those who are stubborn into positions of spiritual leadership. Secondly, we do not appoint those who are easily angered.

Angry

or quick-tempered

There are different words in Greek that may be used to describe anger. As with most languages, different words have different nuances. The word used by Paul in this place refers to nursing anger, feeding it, keeping it alive. It is not a reference to the occasional blow up. Paul is not talking about loosing your cool now and again: he is not talking about loosing your cool with your kids; or cursing the Corvette that cut you off on the Schuylkill Expressway – though of course, we should do neither. Even less is he referring to righteous anger that may be felt against the injustice of the world. No. This is the anger that feeds the desire for revenge. This is the anger that counts and keeps track of each offense: it is the anger of Gollum in the Lord of the Rings: perpetually muttering about the mean hobbits who stole his ring. This is the anger that buries the hatchet, but leaves the handle sticking out – as one of Randy Travis’s songs puts it.

An elder is to be one who has experienced the true forgiveness of Christ and in turn offers that forgiveness to others. He is one who has drained the swamp-waters of bitterness and anger from his life through the power of the living water Jesus Christ gives to all who thirst for such cleansing.

An elder is not stubborn. Nor is he angry. Thirdly, an elder is not outrageous.

Outrageous

or a drunkard

The Baptists have a saying that if a man is drunk with wine they will put him out of the church, but if he is drunk with ambition, they will make him a Deacon. The word used here refers to wine and drunkenness, but the application of its meaning is wider, focusing more upon the consequence of insobriety. Thus the word focuses upon the way in which wine and strong drink can encourage foolish and outrageous behavior: think of college students on spring break; sailors on shore leave; or revelers at Mardi Gras.

Elders are not to be outrageous or flamboyant. An elder is not someone who goes out of his way to draw attention to himself. An elder should not be a person lacking sober minded judgment. He should not draw unwelcome attention to himself because of ill conceived words, actions or behaviors. An elder should be reasonable, steady, dependable, even keeled and predictable.

Elders are not to be stubborn, angry or outrageous. Fourthly, they are not to be given to physical violence.

Given to physical violence

or violent

On one level, we might think to ourselves, “Paul, why did you include this guidance? Is it not obvious that an elder should not be given to physical

violence?” Yet I am grateful that Paul is not presuming the obvious. Including this particular disqualifier makes clear a principle about how the gospel message is to spread.

The word used by Paul is literally translated “a striker.” It refers to someone who is quick to use corporal, physical punishment; someone who slaps another. There are records of some priests and bishops in the early church who had the habit of striking those who may have publicly disagreed with them. The word also encompasses the idea of someone who browbeats others, of one who resorts to force and coercion. Paul’s point is that the gospel message does not spread through coercive means. We do not browbeat people into the kingdom of God. There is no place for corporal punishment within the church. The power of the gospel is the power of the spirit and the power of persuasion. The truth of God stands on its own. It does not require the threat of the sword to advance it.

This, of course, represents a significant contrast between Christianity and the religion of Islam. Islam is a religion that has been spread primarily by conquest, by the sword, by coercive means. And, where Islam has taken root, it is a religion that unapologetically wields the sword for enforcing its obedience. Islam is more interested in outward obedience than it is in inward belief. What matters is that the outward forms be evident and the use of force to encourage the expression of Islamic practice is therefore permitted and encouraged. In contrast, the spiritual leaders of the church are to be men and women who eschew the use of coercion and force in matters of the faith. We want to first persuade the inner man, believing that true human change and growth flows from a regenerated heart desiring to please God.

An elder is not to be stubborn, angry, outrageous, or given to coercion and violence. Lastly, an elder is not to be a money grubber.

Money grubbing

or greedy for gain,

There are honorable ways to make money, and there are less honorable ways to do so. Paul is saying that it matters how you make your money. There is nothing wrong with making money. There is nothing wrong with work, investment or invention. It is not what you do but how you do it. The key is not to place the pursuit of material gain above honor and honesty. Some do not care how they make money. So long as they make it. It was said of the ancient Cretans that they considered no gain disgraceful. They were stuck to money like bees to honey. Paul’s point is that some things cost too much if it means breaking our word, or compromising our integrity, or betraying a trust, or treating those with whom we work as mere objects and not as fellow men and women made in God’s image.

Close – Things an elder should be:

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.

We have, so far, looked at the first parts of Paul's descriptions of the requirements for spiritual leadership within the church. We have looked at the prerequisites and the disqualifiers. The prerequisites are the positive things that must be present in a Christian's life to make him or her eligible for consideration for offices of spiritual leadership. They are: faithfulness in marriage, sober-mindedness in household financial matters, and faithfulness in efforts to pass on the faith given us to our children and household. Next, Paul identifies certain personality traits that are disqualifiers for spiritual leadership. Elders must not be persons who are stubborn. They must be willing to work together in teams. There should not be a reservoir of anger, for an elder is one who has experienced Christ's forgiveness personally and offers it to those who may have harmed and hurt him in the past. An elder is not outrageous, but is sober-minded. The spiritual goal of eldership is to point people to Jesus Christ, not to attract them to ourselves by outrageous antics. An elder controls his actions. He does not brow beat or physically beat others, for the kingdom of God is not spread by coercion. And finally, for this week, an elder pursues his work in the world honorably. His word is dependable. He is not a lover of money. He understands that material gain has its place in life, but it is a place far down on the catalog of values. An elder has his priorities straight: God first; spouse and family second; work and material advancement is a distant third.

Next week, we will look at the things an elder should be: 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.

See you then.

Say "Amen," Somebody.

Titus 1:5 – 9

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