

The Marks of Leadership – Part 2
Titus 1:5 – 9
Fairview Evangelical Presbyterian Church
February 19, 2017

Review – On setting apart church leaders

⁵ For this reason I left you in Crete, that you should set in order the things that are lacking, and appoint elders in every city as I commanded you

Last week we began looking at these opening verses of Paul's letter to Titus. We noted that Paul left Titus on the Greek island of Crete in order to continue organizing the work of the churches there. Specifically, Titus was charged with the task of identifying leaders who could be trusted and set apart as elders in the infant churches. It was Paul's habit to appoint leaders relatively quickly in his mission churches, thus encouraging the churches to quick independence.

As we saw last week, Paul gives three prerequisites for being considered for leadership in the church. Each prerequisite is related to a leader's relationship to his or her family. The family is the proving ground for church leadership: a Christian leader is faithful in marriage; a Christian leader raises his children in the faith; and, lastly, a Christian leader has proven deliberate and intentional in seeking to raise his children into faithful honorable adulthood. Last week we also noted that Paul lists several personality traits that disqualify one from church leadership. These are things an elder should not be. An elder is not to be stubborn, angry, given to outrageous behavior, or to physical violence. An elder is to be honorable in how he makes and uses his money.

Today we will complete our study of these verses from Titus by focusing on the things an elder ought to be, the positive attributes an elder ought to possess in order to be qualified for this important office of spiritual leadership.

Things an elder ought to be

Paul's descriptions of the positive attributes expected of an elder are grouped into three areas: 1) things an elder ought to be towards others; 2) things an elder ought to be within himself; 3) and things an elder ought to be within the church. Let's look at the first grouping, an elder's relationship to others. The first thing Paul lists is an elder's responsibility to be hospitable.

Towards others

Hospitable

⁸ but hospitable,

Permit me to ask a question, one that you may have heard, or asked, in recent weeks or months. The question is this: “What is the Bible’s position on immigration? On legal immigration? On illegal immigration? What is the Christian ‘position’ on these questions?”

A concern I have is that people in the modern world, Christians and non-Christians alike, tend to move to quickly, too easily, to claim the moral high ground of “*The Christian Position*” on this, and other matters. My friend, Rev. Steve Odom, wrote a helpful article last week, published in the Daily News Journal in Tennessee, explaining that we cannot find a Biblical “position” on all the issues before us because the purpose of the “Bible is to lead us to salvation, [and] not necessarily provide a position on every policy question that might arise.” The Bible is not giving guidance to nation states; it is giving instruction to believers.

The word Paul uses, translated as “hospitable,” means literally, “a lover of strangers.” Let me see if I can unpack the implications of this word for us. In the Old Testament there is a repeated three word phrase describing those in the human community who are to be given special attention by God’s people. How God’s people treat these three classes of persons is an indication, a litmus test, of how faithfully God’s people are living their lives in a manner that honors him. The three classes of people are: *the orphan, the widow and the sojourner*. There is good reason why these three are set apart for special care: they are separated from the normal human matrix of relationships that would watch out for and care for them. An orphan lacks parents to protect and guide his growth and development into honorable faithful adulthood. In the ancient world, a woman was either in her father’s house or in the house of her husband. The modern idea of an independent woman, living on her own, making her own way in the world, was quite inconceivable to the ancients. A widow lacked the protection and support of her husband, and so would require special care and support of her spiritual community. Similarly, a sojourner was a person (or persons) on a journey. He was separated from his family and home community. He would not have a network of social relationships to look after him. He would be vulnerable to thieves and the unscrupulous. Paul says that a mark of an elder is to be a lover of strangers. God’s leaders watch out for the least. They reach out to others facing special need.

That said, our world is very different from the ancient world of the Bible. How do we fulfill this expectation and *love strangers* in the modern world? First, *loving strangers is not* expressed by the political and social policies we proclaim and endorse. You do not love strangers by ‘liking’ something on Facebook or Instagram. A year and a half ago, you may recall a terrorist attack at a military recruiting station in Chattanooga, TN. The parents of the radicalized young man who perpetrated the murders were devastated. Their son was radicalized. They were not. In the weeks following, their Christian neighbors gathered around the

family, supporting them, bringing meals, mowing the lawn, offering the grace of Christ. This is what Paul means when he speaks of “loving strangers.”

America is a great country and I am proud of its character and the important place it plays in our world, but there is one area in which I am often disappointed: our hospitality to strangers. I am speaking about hospitality to our neighbors, to strangers. I am not speaking about immigration policy. We have a Christian duty to reach out to those around us, especially those who are foreign born. When we lived in Turkey we befriended a young Muslim man, named Ali, who went on to become a Christian and is now a pastor in Canada. He told me once that he knew more Americans as friends, when he was living as a refugee in Turkey, than he had ever known when he was a college student and resident in the United States.

So let me stress the importance of hospitality. Go out of your way to greet and welcome the new comers who move into your neighborhoods, especially if they are immigrants. If there is a college student in your home, remind him or her to see if there are internationals among their circle of their acquaintance, those whom they might invite to come home with them on spring break. Reach out to those who are alone and may be vulnerable.

This is the first mark, hospitality. The second is to love that which is good.

Loving that which is good

a lover of what is good,

You may have heard of the American evangelist Billy Sunday. He was a generation before Billy Graham. He had been a baseball star. Once during a game, he stole second, third and home base on successive pitches. Billy Sunday was flamboyant, outrageous, loud, and humorous. He said of his ministry, “I get people laughing, and then, while their mouths are open, I ram the gospel down their throats.”

I am not recommending that as an evangelistic methodology, but I do believe that humor has a very powerful persuasive impact upon us, upon our values, our sense of right and wrong, our thinking. Paul tells us that an elder should be one who loves what is good. It is important to remember that knowing and loving what is good does not come easily or naturally to us. We must be trained to know what is good. We must be taught to love what is good.

In our world today it often seems that we are, culturally, in a race to the bottom. Think of the content of the typical evening broadcast on your television. Each situation comedy or drama is filled with spiritual corruption, outrage, scandal, moral emptiness, concupiscence, and conflict. It is a wicked world. Our cultural life is filled with music, art, movies, television, drama, theater, shows,

books and entertainment which reflect the moral and spiritual emptiness of our world. This is the world in which we live.

So the question for us as Christian believers is this: where do we place attention and interest? The world is full of wickedness. Is it wickedness that attracts your time and effort? Paul is saying that a leader in Christ's church will be someone who loves what is good. A Christian believer will be the kind of person who pursues the good, the true, and the beautiful. The music he listens to will encourage a nobility of spirit. The art on his walls will communicate the goodness of God's creation. The television he watches will be shows that celebrate and strengthen human interpersonal relationships. The news he subscribes to will seek to be fair and balanced. His political convictions will be guided by a desire to benefit the common good. His work ethic will be to give a fair day's work for a fair day's pay. His pursuit of hobbies and pleasures will be moderate. The books he reads will be edifying. He will, quite simply, love what is good.

There is also contained in Paul's words a sense of being unselfish in regards to the things an elder loves and cares for in his life. The good things an elder cares for are good things to be shared and enjoyed with others; good things that ultimately belong to God. An elder is not someone who sets up his home as a museum, look but do not touch. The good things are to be used for God's glory. I remember hearing Francis Schaeffer talk about how, because of the nature of their ministry of hospitality, most of their wedding presents were broken or worn out within ten years of marriage. He was not complaining. He was simply pointing out that this was part of the cost of fulfilling the call of God in their lives.

An elder is hospitable. An elder is one who has learned to love that which is good. Now Paul turns to those attributes that are applicable within an elder himself. He first says that an elder is prudent.

Within himself

Prudent

sober-minded,

In a Presbyterian Church we refer to the elders who are serving on the Session as "ruling elders." They are charged with administration and oversight of the ministry of the local church. In their capacity as ruling elders, they must make choices and decisions. For this reason, Paul includes the virtue of prudence as a key attribute to be desired in an elder.

Prudence is one of the four cardinal virtues; the other three being temperance, justice and fortitude. In saying that a virtue is cardinal, we mean that it is pivotal, key. Plato called it the "fairest gift of the gods," arguing that it is the foundation of all other virtue. Prudence is related to wisdom and knowledge.

Prudence is about making the right choices in life. Wisdom and knowledge are essential in providing us with what we need to know to navigate the shores of life, but it is prudence that balances and weighs what is known into the choices and decisions we actually make. Prudence involves choosing the right course of action given the circumstances we are facing. Thus, the pursuit of prudence is the pursuit of balance in life. It involves shunning evil and the wise use of and control of instinct and passion. The prudent seek to make the right and wise choice, at the appropriate time. In a popular sense, a prudent man is one who makes good judgments in life.

Elders are to be prudent men or women because they must make decisions regarding the direction and commitments of a church. They are to be students of God's word in order to learn the principles of God's moral economy in our world. They are to pray, seeking the guidance and direction of the Holy Spirit. And they are to be persons who discern the signs of the times, enabling them to make good, right and wise – that is prudent – decisions on behalf of the church.

Just just,

Justice means to give what is due, to both men and God. We give respect to men. We give reverence to God. Aristotle taught that we can understand virtue as the mean between two extremes. What are the two extremes on either side of justice? They are selflessness on the one hand, and selfishness on the other. One who is selfless gives beyond what is required. He does not demand his due. One who is selfish, demands more than is required. He wants more than is his share, his due. Obviously, selflessness is *greater* than justice. As I have said, justice is receiving what is due. Mercy is not receiving what is due. Grace is receiving that which we do not deserve. Jesus Christ is the greatest example of *selflessness* the world has seen. We do not receive mercy from Jesus, we receive grace. By his sacrifice we do not merely avoid punishment, but we are adopted into God's family – we receive what we do not deserve!

Before I move on, let me say something about what Paul does not mean by justice. In the modern world you will hear people, especially church people influenced by 'progressive' thinking, talk about "the pursuit of justice," or of "justice issues." It is important to ask what is meant by such language. Many who use such language do not use justice in the classic sense of giving to each what is due and proper. Rather, the word justice becomes a shorthand word describing the pursuit of a utopia, a vision of the future, the way the world *ought* to be. Thus for many of these folk in the modern church, justice is not a matter of giving to each individual what is due, but rather a commitment to the pursuit of an ideal vision that must be implemented in the world in the here and now.

Those given to this modern way of thinking, this modern understanding of justice, find that there is often a conflict and tension between the virtues of

prudence and justice. And, typically, for modern folk, justice trumps prudence. In contrast, when Paul writes of justice, he is not speaking of some ideal world to come that we must pursue and bring to fulfillment by our efforts and actions. No. He is speaking of our obligation to give to everyone what is due. To God we give our love and devotion. We gather to worship him and hear his word. To Caesar we give our taxes and fulfill the requirements of being a patriotic citizen. To our boss we give the work that we are called to do. To our parents we give love and respect. To our children we give love and nurture. To our teachers we give honor and gratitude. To those in authority we give deference. This is the vision of justice Paul has in mind.

An elder is hospitable. He loves what is good. He is prudent. He is just. He is holy.

Holy
holy,

Holiness is part of God's nature. One mark of an elder is to be a man or woman who reflects moral and spiritual wholesomeness. The root of the word "holy" means to cut, to set apart. The utensils in the Tabernacle and Temple were holy because they were cut out, set apart to a holy purpose. An elder has been set apart for spiritual service within the church. He understands the spiritual worth and value of the calling he or she has been given. An elder's life should be a reflection of the high moral and spiritual calling that has been entrusted to them. An elder is to set an example.

An elder is hospitable. He loves what is good. He is prudent. He is just. He is holy. And, he is self-controlled.

Self controlled
self-controlled,

Imagine a person in a high security prison. Life in such a place is a life of outside control. Every aspect of life: meals, socializing, exercise, lights out and lights on, is controlled by the prison guards, regulations and the authorities. The control is entirely external. Typically those in a high security prison are there because they lacked self control in the first place.

Life in honorable adulthood is intended to be a life of **self** control. We control our emotions, our schedules, our relationships, our passion, our eating, our drinking, our language, our public presence, and so on. The point is to play by the rules. We are to be men and women who possess self mastery and the law within. Society requires self control. If self control is lacking then there must be outside control. An elder, Paul says, is a spiritual leader who is in control of himself. He is not hotheaded. He does not fly off the handle. He does not need outside incentives. He knows what he is to do, and he pursues it.

In review, an elder is to be hospitable and one who loves what is good in the world. Inwardly, an elder is prudent, just, holy and in control of himself. Next Paul moves to a couple of attributes of an elder that relate to life within the church specifically. An elder is to be orthodox in belief. He is to stand in the tradition he has been taught.

Within the church

Orthodox in belief

⁹ holding fast the faithful word as he has been taught,

Importantly, an elder is to be orthodox in his belief. I think it is hard to overstate the importance of orthodox belief and understanding in fulfilling the mandate of a spiritual office. The New Testament image is that we have been given a deposit of faith, a central core of belief, that we are to hold on to and to seek to pass on to succeeding generations. An elder must be a person who is serious regarding the substance of his faith. He must be willing to hold fast to what has been entrusted to him from the past. He should seek to stand in the deep waters of the Christian faith. The goal is to emphasize and grasp that which is at the common core of our faith. An elder submits himself to the teaching of scripture. He is not interested in promoting his own ideas, but rather understanding and communicating the truth that has been entrusted to him in the pages of the scriptures.

An elder is to be hospitable and one who loves what is good in the world. Inwardly, an elder is prudent, just, holy and in control of himself. An elder is to be orthodox in belief. He is to stand in the tradition he has been taught. And, an elder should be able to teach and explain.

Able to teach and explain and be willing and persuasive in correction

that he may be able, by sound doctrine, both to exhort and convict those who contradict.

'Exhort' is a church word. In contemporary English, you hardly hear it spoken, except in church contexts. The image of exhorting is that of the coach on the sidelines. An elder is to be a cheerleader of a church. My job as pastor is to be the head cheerleader. Contrary to what some Christians think, the ability to criticize is not a spiritual gift. It is not our job to discourage. We are not leading if we discourage God's people. We deal in hope, not despair.

You know the old proverb, "If you cannot say something nice, do not say anything at all." That is the motto of an elder. He is an encourager. My son Benjamin was once privileged to be on a Little League team with one of the finest coaches I have ever known. He set a high, positive standard as to how the kids

on the team were to interact with one another. To give just one example, as a kid approached the batter's box one time, another teammate called out, "Don't get a strike." The coach immediately jumped in saying, "No. What you say is, 'Get a hit!'"

I know some may be thinking, "Fine enough, Pastor Mark, but sometimes correction is needed. What then?" Paul anticipated your concern. His next qualification addresses this, for an elder is to be persuasive in correction.

Another team rule of Benjamin's remarkable coach was this: no kid was permitted to rebuke or correct another team mate, to do so was reserved for the coach alone. The coach explained that when a kid makes a mistake on the field, nearly every time he knows precisely what he has done wrong. So there is no need for his teammates to rebuke him. In addition, the coach is the only person on the team who has the skill and knowledge to know how to offer suggested correction and improvement.

This is what Paul is getting at in regards to the elders. One of the responsibilities of elders is to deal with controversy, division and ethical or moral failure. They must be prepared to give reproof and correction. Paul's Idea is that an elder must be able to speak in a way that those being rebuked will hear what is being said to them. An elder must understand the wise use of words. He must rebuke wisely, with compassion. The goal is not merely to yell or fling angry words. The intent is to rebuke in a manner that the person admits error. Thus an elder will know how to demonstrate the truth of what is said. He will not be one sided and will not given to giving people a dressing down. The aim is restoration and change. He speaks to convince, but not humiliate.

Close – review of part 1 & part 2

Paul has touched upon the attributes of an elder. These are the guidelines to Titus as he seeks to fulfill the mandate given him to appoint worthy leaders among the churches of Crete. The prerequisites of spiritual leadership are revealed in the home. An elder is faithful in marriage, responsible in household finances and intentional in raising his children to know and love Jesus Christ. An elder is not to be stubborn, angry, given to outrageous behavior, or to physical violence. An elder is to be honorable in how he makes his money. In addition, an elder is to be hospitable and one who loves what is good. He is committed to the virtues of prudence, justice, holiness and self-control. He is an encourager. He knows how to choose his words in a manner that persuades. And lastly, but not least, he is thoroughly orthodox in the substance of the faith he confesses.

Say "Amen," Somebody.

⁵ For this reason I left you in Crete, that you should set in order the things that are lacking, and appoint elders in every city as I commanded you— ⁶ if a man is blameless, the husband of one wife, having faithful children not accused of dissipation or insubordination. ⁷ For a bishop must be blameless, as a steward of God, not self-willed, not quick-tempered, not given to wine, not violent, not greedy for money, ⁸ but hospitable, a lover of what is good, sober-minded, just, holy, self-controlled, ⁹ holding fast the faithful word as he has been taught, that he may be able, by sound doctrine, both to exhort and convict those who contradict.