Titus Part 2: The Character of a Leader FCC 9-22-19

A famous preacher had a friend who was well known for his short temper. One day, at a party, he asked this friend to help him serve some drinks. The preacher himself poured the drinks, deliberately filling several of the glasses a bit too full. He then passed the tray to his friend. As they walked into the room to distribute the drinks, he accidentally-on-purpose bumped into the friend, causing the tray to jiggle and some of the drinks to slosh over the brim and spill. “There you are, you see,” said the preacher. “When you’re jolted, what spills out is whatever is filling you.” When you’re suddenly put to the test and don’t have time to think about how you’re coming across, your real nature will come out. And leaders get bumped a lot. That’s why Paul wrote the passage we are going to study today: **Titus 1:5-9**.

*Tit 1:5 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—*

Titus is not the pastor of a church in Crete, but oversees all of them as Paul’s representative. The first job Paul gives the details on is to **appoint** elders. The Greek means to put in place or designate, with the nuance of permanence. Wait a minute, that’s not what we do, we nominate and vote on people, right?! Well, this is a situation in which new churches have been planted. Many new church plants operate that same way today. The pastor who plants the church simply appoints qualified people to leadership roles, and they serve indefinitely, until the church becomes more stable and structured. The churches on Crete were in those early phases of development.

This verse also says that Titus is supposed to appoint elders **in every town**. That’s interesting- he says in every town, not every church. Think back to our Christian beginnings- there were no denominations. There was essentially only one church in each town. Though they may have gathered in different homes, or they were a combination of house churches, they were still supposed to have one main leadership body and work together as one to reach their cities. Paul is going to describe the characteristics that those leaders need to have. So we continue…

*Tit 1:6 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.*

*Tit 1:7 For an overseer, as God's steward, must be…*

Wait a minute!!! We just can’t seem to make any progress today- we keep running into issues! Verses 5 and 7 use different words- verse 5 says elder and verse 7 says overseer. Why? Greek for elder is *presbuteros*. It’s the root of English words like presbyter and Presbyterian. It simply refers to one who is advanced in life and maturity. Among the Jews, it referred to members of the Sanhedrin- their leading council.

Greek for overseer is *episkopos*. It’s the root of the word episcopal. It simply refers to someone in a supervisory role; a guardian or superintendent. It’s a more general term. Elder is more specific, implying someone older who is likely to have a family. Therefore, these character standards apply to leaders in any age bracket.

At this point we encounter the second objection to Paul being the author of the letters to Titus and Timothy. In these letters we read about elders and overseers. Some English translations say bishops and presbyters. It is claimed by some liberal scholars that the use of these terms shows a more advanced church organization than what could have existed during the lifetime of Paul. Therefore, Paul could not have written these letters to Titus and Timothy. They were written later by someone else. What do we say to that?

Well, if we read these letters carefully we find that these terms, like elder and overseer, are used somewhat interchangeably, and so it is difficult to construct a replica of the leadership structure of the first churches that the apostles planted, based on these letters. Less structure was needed because the apostles themselves spent more time in these early churches. And so, we don’t see, an advanced church structure in these letters, so I believe they were actually written by Paul, when these churches were first started, sometime between the years of 62 and 66 AD. Remember, our faith hinges on the authenticity of the books of the Bible!

So now let’s continue. Let’s read verses 6-9 at once, then we will go back through the character traits listed by Paul.

*Tit 1:6 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.*

*Tit 1:7 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,*

*Tit 1:8 but hospitable, a lover of good, self-controlled, upright, holy, and disciplined.*

*Tit 1:9 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.*

Paul lists a lot of character traits in these verses. We’re just going to take a quick look at each of them. Then we will conclude by looking at how we apply these traits as a whole.

**Tit 1:6**

* His. Based on this word used here, many evangelical churches will limit the leadership of groups that include adult men to adult male leaders. So for such churches, the pastor, elders, deacons, and certain teachers would be male. This topic, like so many of the character traits Paul lists here, are worthy of a sermon or Bible study by themselves. If you have any questions about any of these, we can talk later. But today, we want to keep moving down the path toward the mountain, to use the analogy I gave you last week. We will glance at these rocks, or smaller topics, as we go by.
* Above reproach. Or, blameless. This is a general term to refer to public reputation. We’ll come back to it in a minute.
* The husband of one wife. This is generally understood as a command against polygamy rather than a command against divorce. But that’s not to say that divorce should be ignored when selecting leaders. I’ve been divorced, so have some of you. We all need to be open about that.
* His children are believers and not open to the charge of debauchery or insubordination. This means that the children are trustworthy, not living a life of excess or carelessness, and are respectful. Paul mentions standards for the elders’ marriage and children. Why? If we cannot secure the best interests of our immediate family, and facilitate their spiritual formation, it naturally raises the question: can we do that for our church family? Paul will bring up this theme of family again in chapter 2.

**Tit 1:7**

* As God's steward. Or, a manager. The idea of a steward is one of Paul’s favorite concepts of the ministry. He says he is a steward of grace, of the mysteries of God, of the truth, and of the church. (1 Cor 4:1-2, Eph 3:2, Col 1:25, 1 Tim 1:4). The word “as” shows that being a steward is more than a character trait: it’s part of the leader’s identity.
* Above reproach. Paul lists this one twice. Why? The liars on Crete may have had a tendency to make false accusations, so Paul is probably encouraging the selection of leaders whose character would be so firmly established in the community that false accusations wouldn’t last. People might sling mud, but make sure the mud won’t stick!
* Not be arrogant. Even though the leader oversees the church, he does not see himself as over and above the church. Arrogance comes when we take a godly intention or action that we *think* we possess and view it as a standard that we *think* others do not uphold. And we start wondering “Why aren’t my Godly intentions or actions everyone else’s intentions or actions”. And when we start asking questions that start with “How come nobody…”, or other all-exclusive language, be careful. Our spirituality can become part of our arrogance. It is subtle but toxic.
* Not be quick-tempered. Anger has 3 sources: hurt, fear, and frustration. Everyone experiences these feelings and being in leadership tends to add another layer to them. Anger is always looking for an outlet, and if you don’t root out the anger in your life, and deal with the sources of it, it will find a way out, and it will be toxic to the people you are leading.
* Not be a drunkard. Literally, not “staying near wine”. This speaks to the overall issue of self-medication and unhealthy coping mechanisms. It’s not prohibiting an occasional drink. The leaders coping mechanism needs to consist of Christian disciplines guided by the Holy Spirit. Dallas Willard has really great teaching about these in his book *Spirit of the Disciplines*.
* Not be violent. Keep in mind that violence is broader than physical punches. This means not being prone to argumentation. Arguments start when we use aggression in our tone of voice and body language, which causes emotions to escalate. If we want to try to avoid arguments, we need to learn how to keep our own emotions at a calm level when addressing each other. It means conducting ourselves in ways that help the person we are talking to remain at ease and not feel threatened. To be sure, we cannot control someone else’s feelings, but you might be surprised at how much influence you have. If emotions are allowed to rise, a low-level offense can become much more than that in short order. So ask yourself: what effect do I have on others when I address them?
* Not be greedy for gain. Or, not using your influence as a leader to your financial advantage. Interest in money beyond the necessities of life can cloud the leader’s judgment.

**Tit 1:8**

* Hospitable. It means “fond of guests”. American culture might condition us to think that hospitality involves a great party with lively activity and conversation, which implies that you need to be an extrovert to be hospitable. But a simple and quiet time with someone is just as valuable.
* A lover of good. This doesn’t mean the leader is just capable of pointing out evil or sin and correcting it; it means he does things to promote virtue and to help people grow in virtue. This is a generalization, but it seems that sometimes we are better at hating evil than we are at loving good. I can’t say more about that today, so I offer that to you for reflection in your own devotional time.
* Self-controlled. We use this term broadly, and that’s good, but in this context it is referring more specifically to being on an even keel mentally and emotionally. It means that your thoughts are not fixated on one opinion or method, and your judgments are not swayed by extreme passion for one thing or extreme distaste for another. Not favoring one person over another. My mentor Vern says it this way: Don’t let anything people do or say make you emotionally lopsided.
* Upright. This broad term refers to a leader’s relationships with people: promoting equality and justice.
* Holy. This refers to one’s relationship with God: undefiled by sin or wickedness, righteous. Also describes the overall character of a leader.
* Disciplined. Having power over self. You have to conquer yourself before you can conquer anything else. You have to lead yourself before you can lead anyone else.

**Tit 1:9**

* Hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught. Paul is referring to the gospel of the Kingdom that he passed on from Jesus. Leaders have a greater responsibility to learn to differentiate true doctrine from false doctrine.

That concludes Paul’s list of essential qualities for those who lead the church as a whole: elders and overseers. But how do we apply it in our church today?

**Applicable to all believers and leaders**

Our leadership structures today are quite a bit more involved. We have more ministry programs than the early church had, with more and different leadership roles. And that’s ok as long as we don’t overextend ourselves or get too fixated on a certain set of programs or leadership structures. Paul probably did not have all of today’s programs and structures in mind when he wrote about character requirements for leaders, but they are applicable because the term “overseer” is a broad term. It would encompass all leaders in the churches of today and the future.

Let’s just take a moment to review the definition of leadership we looked at last week: “A Christian leader is one who, with God-given capacity and God-given responsibility, influences a specific group of God’s people toward God’s purposes for the group.”

The character standards in Titus apply to all Christian leaders. Think about how that applies to us. In our church, based on biblical principles and values, we have a congregational form of government. Many things are decided by vote. That vote carries with it a specific leadership responsibility because if you vote for something that is passed, you are operating on the assumption that the will of God will be reflected in the will of the majority and you are therefore asking the whole church to submit to that majority rule. That’s the philosophy behind it. So your vote is a form of influence. And that’s essentially what leadership is: influence. So our congregational structure here is biblical as long as we understand the leadership responsibility that each member has through their vote. That responsibility carries with it certain basic Christian character requirements. Therefore this passage is a reference point for appropriate standards for voting members as well.

Also remember, at the end of the day, there are no double standards for the children of God. Pastors, elders, deacons, ministry leaders, church voting members, church attendees, anyone who professes Christ is held to the same standards. It’s just that the accountability is typically more intentional for pastors, deacons, or anyone with a more public or more broad leadership role.

**Attainable by all believers and leaders**

Now, if you are like me and find this list of qualifications to be challenging and maybe even a little intimidating, take a preview with me of Titus 2:11-12.

*Tit 2:11 For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people,*

*Tit 2:12 training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age…*

Did you catch that? Those are some of the same character traits we just studied. And they can be developed through training, by God’s grace. We learn it and grow into it over time. Growth in character is a process. In the world of leadership theory, one of the big questions is: are leaders born or are leaders made? The biblical answer about the spiritual leaders for the church is that spiritual leaders are made. Whether God calls someone to leadership at birth or at age 100, he forms them into the kind of spiritual leaders He wants them to be if they allow themselves to be trained by grace.

Besides, think about the passage from 2 Peter we read today.

*2Pe 1:3 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,*

*2Pe 1:4 by which he has granted to us his precious and very great promises, so that through them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped from the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire.*

Notice the phrases Peter uses: “all things that pertain to life and godliness” and “partakers of the divine nature”. Peter and Paul talk about character transformation as if it is totally possible. Difficult, challenging, gut-wrenching, excruciating, but possible. This is one of the beautiful and unique things about Christianity: we have a view of the depravity of the human heart that may appear quite pessimistic, but we have an outrageously optimistic view of the ability of the human heart to be transformed in purity and fruitfulness as that heart interacts with the grace of God. And that is good news.

But there’s more good news…

Before we started studying this book, if I would have asked you to close your eyes and picture a successful leader, what sort of person would come to mind? Many times we think of a leader as having certain special qualities. But what does Paul say? Does Paul say that leaders are supposed to: have lots of charisma? Be dynamic motivational speakers? Be extroverts? Be clever at advertising? Have an attractive stage presence? Be magnificent church building architects? Be business executives? Be clever political strategists? The answer to all of those is NO. Now, that doesn’t mean church leaders can’t also be those things. Sometimes they are. But those things are not biblical requirements for church leadership, though as Americans it seems we like to make those associations.

The fact of the matter is that the church is not a business, even though we handle money and do other business-like things. And the church is not an advertising firm, even though we do advertise. And the church is not a political entity, even though we have officers. And the church is not a building, though we have one. And the church is not an entertainment company, even though we do some things that are pretty entertaining sometimes. The church is a spiritual entity. J. Oswald Sanders, who was a director for the Overseas Missionary Fellowship, said: “*Spiritual goals can be achieved only by spiritual people who use spiritual methods*.”

Personally, I’ve always taken a lot of comfort in that quote. When I was in Bible college, and I observed fellow students who seemed like great ministry leaders. They would lead successful ministry trips and lots of wonderful things would happen- like everything they touched turned to gold. There was something about them that drew people to them, and I could never put my finger on what it was. And whatever it was, I didn’t have it. I wasn’t asked to lead ministry trips. I was asked to lead the Theological Society and co-lead the prayer ministry. You can imagine how popular of a choice those were for student involvement!

God taught me that it’s not personality that matters to him- it’s spirituality, and the primary expression of that spirituality is character.

As we look ahead to the time we will have to discern who God might call to be the next pastor of this church, what criteria will be used to make that decision? What will be at the top of the list of characteristics that man should have?

An early church document called the Apostolic Constitutions, compiled about the year 390 AD, says “If the sinner sees that the bishop and deacons are innocent and unblamable and that the flock is pure, he will not venture to despise their authority.” Christ-like character is our best witness to the gospel!

A true story makes the point: It rains quite a lot in the north of England but early September 2008 was exceptional. It had poured for days on end, with as much rain falling on the final day of the spell they’d normally expect in a month. It wasn’t the nicest time to be out for a walk, but one family had decided to brave it. As they were crossing a park in the town of Chester-Le-Street, the family dog went to splash in a large puddle, and the three-year-old daughter went to join him. Suddenly, without warning, the little girl simply disappeared. The father, running up, saw the dog disappear as well. He realized in a flash what had happened: a storm drain had burst its cover beneath the puddle, and the girl and the dog had both been sucked down into the drain. Thinking quickly, the father, Mark Baxter, realized that a storm drain would most likely spill out into the river, about a hundred yards away. He set off at once at a run. When he got to the river, he spotted the girl’s coat floating downstream— with Laura, his daughter, face-down inside it. Immediately he plunged in and rescued her, bruised and battered but alive. A miracle? In a sense, yes. All sorts of things might have happened. The little girl could have become stuck somewhere underground. She might already, by the time her father reached her, have inhaled enough water to drown her. But what impressed me most was what the father said afterward about his frantic run to the riverbank. “Every time I thought a bad thought,” he said, “I forced myself to think of something else.” That’s the secret. Mark Baxter wasn’t working out, step by step, what he had to do. He had grasped that in a flash. But he needed self-discipline to keep a firm grip on his own thoughts. All kinds of fears and terrors were, no doubt, rushing into his mind, threatening to make him panic or go to pieces. But he consciously made the effort to replace the bad thoughts with good ones, and to concentrate on what he had to do. That is “character.” It doesn’t come by accident. It comes through the self-discipline required to do anything in life really well. When you’re working hard at a difficult or complex task, the mind will try to jump away, to focus instead on something easier or more enticing. And again and again, if you’re going to get the job done, you have to force your mind back onto the job. You train your mind to focus. And when it comes to building character this is essential because if you get the thoughts right the behavior will normally follow. As it happens, Mark Baxter worked for the British Royal Air Force. He learned his self-discipline in a field where it is obviously vital at every minute. The ability to size up a situation, figure out what to do, and do it as though by instinct is one thing; the ability to hold at arm’s length the thoughts that would terrify and paralyze you as you go about it is another thing. That’s not a skill you pick up by accident. It’s something you learn. So practice it in the smaller things every day to prepare yourself for the more difficult or surprising circumstances when you won’t have time to stop and think. There’s a nice sideline to this story. Little three-year-old Laura had been taking swimming lessons. She had learned to do a “star float,” spreading herself out and allowing the water to support her. When she regained consciousness after being rescued, she explained to her father that she’d been trying to do the “star float,” but hadn’t been able to because the tunnel was too narrow. Even at that age, she had learned that regular practice prepares you for unexpected things. And leadership is filled with unexpected things.

If people like Mark and his daughter can grow in character, in his case specifically self-control and discipline, how much more can those who believe in Christ grow in character as grace is applied and the Holy Spirit imparted in the context of a spiritual family? It is possible, and it is our most powerful apologetic. If we don’t let God fix us, we’re sending the world the message that He can’t fix them either.