

GOD, THE GOSPEL & HIS GLORY

ELDERSHIP – TITUS 1:1-9

Paul Goffin

This letter is from Paul, a slave of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ. I have been sent to proclaim faith to those God has chosen and to teach them to know the truth that shows them how to live godly lives. This truth gives them confidence that they have eternal life, which God, who does not lie promised them before the world began. And now at just the right time he has revealed this message, which we announce to everyone. It is by the command of God our Saviour that I have been entrusted with this work for him. I am writing to Titus, my true son in the faith that we share. May God the Father and Christ Jesus our Saviour give you grace and peace. I left you on the island of Crete so you could complete our work there and appoint elders in each town as I instructed you. An elder must live a blameless life. He must be faithful to his wife, and his children must be believers who don't have a reputation for being wild or rebellious. A church leader is a manager of God's household, so he must live a blameless life. He must not be arrogant or quick-tempered; he must not be a heavy drinker, violent, or dishonest with money. Rather, he must enjoy having guests in his home, and he must love what is good. He must live wisely and be just. He must live a devout and disciplined life. He must have a strong belief in the trustworthy message he was taught; then he will be able to encourage others with wholesome teaching and show those who oppose it where they are wrong.

The letter begins by introducing its author, the Apostle Paul. Paul was not one of the original disciples of Jesus, and indeed he spent his earlier life persecuting the disciples of Jesus, but he became an apostle after he met with the risen Jesus whilst he was on his way to Damascus to persecute the early church, as detailed in Acts 9. The word apostle is derived from the Greek, meaning messenger, but has a stronger meaning than "messenger", and has a sense more like being a delegate, someone with authority. Paul saw himself as being a slave of God, as a person totally devoted to serving his master, and his job was to proclaim faith in God and teach men how to live godly lives. He did not choose to do this work, but rather God chose him and entrusted him with the task.

This demonstrates what Paul's task was, and also the motivation behind it. He was not seeking worldly riches, acclaim or power, or acting for his own benefit. Instead, he was serving God and seeking to bring the gospel to others, so working for them as well. When we look at a person's actions it is always good to examine their motivations as well. We can then judge the real person, and God is very interested in why we do things, as well as what we actually do. Paul would suffer greatly in doing the work that God had called him to, (Corinthians 11:23-27).

In this letter Paul is writing to Titus, a son in the faith, whom he had left on Crete to appoint elders and build up the churches in the island. He starts by blessing Titus, and asks that God will give him grace and peace, two things that we can all do with more of in our lives. The churches would have been new ones, with no leadership in place, or only early forms of leadership, so Paul is giving instructions to Titus about how he should appoint elders in the churches.

- Good leadership in the church is important because defective leadership at the top of the church can lead to big problems. This was a problem then as it is now. For a church to be strong, safe and effective there must be leadership based on Godly principles, and not those of the world. The church should be a place of safety and this requires leaders who can protect the flock. The analogy to shepherding is not accidental, people will wander from the truth if they are left to their own devices.
- We see that the elders, who were to lead the church, were put into place quite soon after the churches were founded. The principles are laid down here, it is not a situation of experimentation to see what works best. God has a plan for leadership.
- Leadership must be on the basis of God's word. There are many organisations and form of leadership in the world, but in the church it must be God's word that is the guiding principle in all things.

- The role of the elders is to lead and teach the people the truth from God's word. The people can then grow in the word of God and teach their children God's word.
- There should be more than one elder in the church. Having one person in sole leadership can be a very dangerous situation, as there are no checks and balances upon what they do, no support for them from peers, and error and personal quirks can creep in. Good leadership requires a strong team where a number of elders can all bring their strengths together for the common good. There may be a lead elder, the pastor heading up the team but there should be a plurality of elders.

Given these facts, Paul instructs Titus on the personal qualities that are required if a person is to become an elder. In modern parlance this is the person specification.

- These standards are nothing extraordinary: God does not want any qualities in elders that are not achievable by any member of the church, and we should all aim to achieve these standards in our lives. Aiming to achieve these personal standards is something we should all aspire to if we are Christians.
- God is not looking for wealth, social status, education, country of origin, age, personal connections or even spiritual gifts. The world values these but God has a different set of standards.
- The people God is seeking are self-controlled, forbearing, just, devout, peaceable, loyal husbands, good fathers and committed to the word of God. It is clear that only men can become elders. This may not be in accordance with what the world would currently teach, and also this does not mean that women are not able to fulfil leadership roles, but they cannot be elders. Being the wife of an elder is also a very important role in the church.
- God is not seeking perfection in elders. If he did there would be no elders as no human is perfect, but the standards are still set high. To admit men to eldership who do not meet the standards would be folly, as they would not be able to fulfil the duties laid upon them.
- Blameless: their character or conduct should not be able to be called into question, especially in matters of morality. This does not mean that elders should be perfect, this is not possible, but their way of life should be such that no-one can question their morals and behaviour.
- Husband of one wife: This means that an elder should be a "one-woman man". An elder can be single, and can be remarried after his first wife has died. It is debateable whether a divorced man can be an elder.
- His children must be believers: this probably means that an elder must have children who are under control and able to receive teaching from the parents. If a child is young, they cannot decide to be a Christian, and the parents cannot be held to be responsible for their decision in any case. The point is that if a person cannot guide his own family they cannot be expected to guide the, much bigger and more diverse, church family. It is in the family home and marriage that a person can be seen for what they really are. You may be able to put a facade on at work or with your friends, but it is not possible at home.
- He must live a blameless life and not be arrogant, quick tempered, drink to excess, be violent or dishonest with money. These are all areas that show the underlying character of a person.
- An elder must show hospitality to others, (Job 31:32) which is a practical demonstration of kindness. He must also love what is good.
- He must spend time reading and studying the Scriptures and be able to encourage and teach others. This is very important as if the leaders do not know the truth for themselves they will be unable to lead others towards it, and that is their main role, to strengthen and build up the church.

We can see that being an elder, or having any leadership role in a church, is a calling from God. Our motivation and attitude are important, and we must lead in an attitude of service. Leadership is there to strengthen and bless those who are led, and equip them to lead good Christian lives and spread the gospel. As members of the church we have a personal duty to serve and support the leaders in our church that God has put installed. We should aim to be a blessing to our leaders so that they, in turn, can bless us