
⁵The reason I left you in Crete was so that you would set in order the things that were left unfinished and appoint elders in every city, as I directed you. ⁶Such a man is to be blameless, the husband of only one wife, and to have believing children who are not open to a charge of wild living or disobedience. ⁷Indeed an overseer, since he is God’s steward, must be blameless, not arrogant, not quick-tempered, not a drunkard, not violent, not eager for dishonest gain. ⁸Instead, he must be hospitable, loving what is good, self-controlled, upright, devout, and disciplined. ⁹He must cling to the trustworthy message as it has been taught, so that he will be able both to encourage people by the sound teaching and also to correct those who oppose him.

A fresh-faced pastor knelt at the rail in the front of his new church. He had just been assigned there right out of the seminary, and the church was packed to welcome the new pastor. One of about fifteen pastors in white robes and red stoles stood in front of him and told him, “Pastor, carry out your ministry with blameless behavior and more importantly, with the trustworthy message.” He then recited part of Paul’s letter to Titus that we have in front of us this morning.

This scene is not completely uncommon. Maybe you’ve had the opportunity to sit in plenty of installation services for new pastors. Most of the services look the same. The pastor may be different, but the responsibility is the same. Two of those important responsibilities were just listed: Live with blameless behavior and cling to the trustworthy message of God’s word.

In the section from Titus today, Paul speaks to Pastor Titus to encourage him to carry out his ministry faithfully. Why? Because God’s people need to be kept in the truth. Paul’s main focus is strengthening the faith of Christians. This is why he’s encouraging Titus with this letter. He’s supporting him to carry out his calling well. With this background in mind, it is clear that the message of this section is a message to public ministers like Titus.

Now, what is public ministry? Let’s compare it with what we call the private ministry. Because all believers are part of the royal priesthood of God, according to 1 Peter 2:9, each and every believer has been entrusted with the right and responsibility to proclaim Christ to the world. But not everyone in the church can go to seminary. We can’t all quit our jobs and work full-time for the church. And if all of us stood up front to distribute the Lord’s Supper, it would get a little chaotic. This is why, since the early Christian church, congregations would call men to serve as their pastors, or spiritual shepherds. These men would be entrusted with the responsibility of being educated in God’s word, of preaching and teaching the word of God in its truth and purity, and of administering the sacraments. Therefore, the difference between public ministry and private ministry is this: Bringing the message of Jesus to people in your everyday, private lives, or bringing that message to people on behalf of and by a call from the church.

Titus’ job in Crete is going to be to organize the church. Because he is not going to be their pastor long-term, he is to appoint and train the elders of the congregation who will serve as pastors. This might sound different than the way our church body operates, and it is. The early Christian Church was not blessed with seminaries to train spiritual leaders like we have today. Instead, because there were only a handful of experts in God’s word, spiritual leaders in the church would be identified, trained, and installed by men like Titus. You can see a good comparison in the way our synod handles foreign missions. They send missionaries into a country with the end goal of training up new pastors who have grown up in the culture and can lead God’s Church in their own homeland.

Titus is a public minister training other public ministers to serve in the church. But as we work through this section, the encouragement from Paul could also be easily applied to every Christian carrying out his or her private ministry.

First, we see Paul setting a behavioral standard for Titus as he seeks out leaders to shepherd the church in Crete. Look at the list. These elders of the church are to be blameless. This is the overarching theme of all of these. The purpose is to live about blame, above accusation. But Paul continues by telling Titus what that means. He is to be the husband of only one wife, not living as a womanizer. He's supposed to have a stable marriage, serving as an example for those he serves. In the same way, he's not to be a man with wild and unbelieving kids. If his family were unstable, wouldn't it lead people to ask the question, "If he can't keep his own family in line, how should we expect him to keep the church in line?" He's not supposed to be arrogant, quick-tempered, or a drunk. He's not supposed to be vicious or selfish. A spiritual leader cannot serve his people if he is hard to get along with and harsh. On the flip side, we hear that Titus is to seek the kind of man who is kind, disciplined, and motivated. If he is not supposed to be a rough man, then he needs to be gentle, kind, and loving of the people he serves.

Why does Paul demand these things from the elders of the church? Is it because their attitudes will win people for Jesus? No, we know that "faith comes from hearing the message, and the message comes through the word of Christ." But ungodly behavior can become a dam that keeps the waters of God's message from getting to the fields they need to water.

Let me ask it like this: If I stumbled up into the pulpit this morning with booze on my breath, clearly drunk, would that change how you think of the sermon you're hearing that morning? If I sat in front of the Bible class and talked down to someone who answered a question incorrectly, would that change your view on how much you want to attend Bible class? One of the biggest lies of our age is that we can live and act however we want, and people have to be ok with it. It's not true! You might think the things you say send a message to the people around you, but your actions sometimes speak louder than words ever could. Paul is telling Pastor Titus to seek out men who will not jam up the river of God's message but will lead lives that let the gospel flow freely.

Paul is giving these qualifications to Titus as he seeks out those who will carry out public ministry in the church, but can you see how these qualifications are also important for you as you bring Christ to people in your sphere of influence? Sinful and selfish living certainly does get in the way of the gospel. Who will care to listen to you talk about the blessings of marriage and family if you're always complaining about your wife and ditching quality time for your kids for some hobby? Who will give an ear to you sharing your faith if you're stumbling out of the bar every Saturday night? Who will listen to you talk about the importance of peace in life when your disputes with others are widely known? You will not convince people to believe in Jesus by the way you live your life. But you sure can convince them that they better stay away from Jesus if they look at the way you live out your faith and don't want that hypocrisy for themselves.

As you live your life, think of yourself as a walking billboard for God. Everything you do will be watched and judged. And whether you think it's fair or unfair, people will equate Christianity (and even the Lord himself) to how you live. And when you sin – because you still have that sinful nature waging war against the new self in your heart – the way you respond to sin will also speak volumes. You'll have the opportunity to show what it means to be sorry over sin. You'll have the opportunity to go to the Lord in repentance and show that all sins are forgiven in Christ. The question then is this: Will people see you as a humble sinner saved by the grace of God and living in that grace? Or will they see you as some arrogant narcissist who sells yourself as a great and godly person while constantly turning your back on everything Jesus has done and taught? Listen to

Paul's advice. Live out your faith. Because nothing confesses your faith in Jesus like the way you live in thanks to him.

But if the way we live and act does not get people to believe in Jesus, if it only gets us out of the way so that God's word can speak clearly, then we need to spend some time talking about the power of God's word. And that's exactly what Paul does. After he talks about how the elders in the church in Crete should carry themselves in their ministries, he looks at the source of their faith. He writes, "He must cling to the trustworthy message as it has been taught, so that he will be able both to encourage people by the sound teaching and also to correct those who oppose him." What was the single most important trait God was seeking out in his ministers in Crete and everywhere else? It was that they would cling to the word.

Today, this is our greatest qualification for our pastors as well. Do they hold to God's word? Do they use that word properly to encourage and teach? Do they use it to correct error when it rears its ugly head? A pastor's authority does not come from how well he can rouse a room with his sermon. A pastor's authority doesn't come from the gentleness he shows to the widows or his ability to swap hunting stories with the people at his church. His authority – the reason we are to listen to our pastors – is found in Jesus and his word.

Understand that this does not mean that pastors are without sin. They fall short of God's glory and need to hear those wonderful words of forgiveness from Jesus' lips just like anyone else. But as they speak God's word in its truth and purity to you, they come with Jesus' authority. You may notice that in the confession and absolution of some of our services, the pastor says, "As a called servant of Christ and by his authority, I forgive you all your sins." Maybe you've wondered what (or who) gives him the right to forgive sins. It's the authority of God's word. This is why Paul states that these ministers in Crete ought to be men that cling to God's word. This is where God's truth is found. This is where the authority to preach that truth is given.

Again, this section is talking about public ministers in the church and not the private ministry of every Christian. But there is certainly authority whenever the word of God is spoken. When you use the mirror of the law to show your friend their sin, there is authority and power in those words. When you announce to that repentant friend that they are forgiven, it is as if Jesus himself is speaking those words to them.

What does this mean for you? Cling to the message. Cling to the message that you may continue to be encouraged by sound teaching and encourage others in it too. Cling to the message so that when the lies of the devil present themselves as truth, you are able to combat them with all the truths of God's word. Cling to the message, so that you may live a life of thanks that God has called you to and uses to make sure the spread of the gospel of Christ cannot be gunked up and stopped. And pray for and encourage the pastors that you know, that they may serve as the hand of Jesus in the church and equip others to be his hands in everyday life. Amen.