

The Traits and Tasks of the Teacher

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[0 : 00] Well, a very good afternoon to you. Welcome to the Wednesday lunchtime Bible talk here at the Tron. We are carrying on a series in Paul's letter to Titus, and we're picking it up midway through chapter one. So if you wouldn't mind turning in your Bibles with me to Titus, it's on page 998 in the church Bibles there, Titus chapter one. And we're focusing particularly on verses five to nine of chapter one, but I'll read from the start of the chapter. So that's Titus chapter one.

Paul, a servant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ, for the sake of the faith of God's elect and their knowledge of the truth, which accords with or leads to godliness in hope of eternal life, which God, who never lies, promised before the ages began and at the proper time manifested in his word through the preaching with which I have been entrusted by the command of God, our savior. To Titus, my true child in a common faith, grace and peace from God, the father and Christ Jesus, our savior. 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. If anyone is above reproach, the husband of one wife and his children are believers are not open to the charge of debauchery or in subordination. For an overseer as God's steward must be above reproach.

He must not be arrogant or quick tempered or drunkard or violent or greedy for gain, but hospitable, a lover of good, self-controlled, upright, holy and disciplined.

He must hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught so that he may be able to give instruction and sound doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict it. This is the word of the Lord. And in a moment, we'll come back to think about that. But let us pray as we begin our time together. Let's pray.

Heavenly Father, as we gather together this lunchtime, in the midst of busy days, in the midst of real trials and sadnesses perhaps, in the midst of all that distracts from you, help us, we ask, to focus on you, to focus upon your word, and to consider you our creator God. You are the Lord of our lives. You are the one to whom we owe everything. You give us every breath. You give us the hope of eternal life, which we do not deserve.

[3 : 27] Thank you so much that the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people. Would you help us, Father, in the light of this glorious gospel truth, to live godly lives, that we, as we wait for the appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, might live lives that shine bright for you, lives that please you.

Help us, Father, as we come to your word now, to listen, to submit, to obey to what we find there. And we ask this in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ and Savior. Amen. Job interviews. Horrible things, aren't they?

I know a fair number of folk who have had job interviews recently. One chap yesterday had a 90-minute interview down in Oxford. He said it was horrible. Most of us at one time or another will have to go through that or have done so at some point in life.

And you know the sort of questions you get. Tell us about your skills, your experience. How can you demonstrate that you're an effective team player? And the interview is there to help the employers get the right person for the job.

[4 : 57] That's what it's all about. Well, what about the church? When thinking about looking for the next church leader, preacher, teacher, the guy to train, what qualities, skills, criteria spring to mind?

Do we look for what the world looks for in a good employee or a business leader? Is that what we're looking for? Now, we probably know that at some level, we shouldn't just apply unthinkingly worldly criteria to a church leader.

But in practice, it's quite hard to not do that. We automatically think in worldly terms. What are we to look for in our church leaders?

What is the future church leader to aspire to? Now, perhaps you've already mentally switched off at this point in the talk. This isn't for me.

This is all about church leaders. I'm not one of them. But this is a message for all of us. It really does matter who leads the church.

[6 : 08] One day, you might be involved in choosing the next leader for your church. And it's certainly all of our job to pray for our church leaders, to pray for the identification of future church leaders.

What sorts of things ought we to pray for? Well, these few verses in Titus show us what to look for in Christian teachers and leaders. They tell us what sort of men will teach the truth that leads to godliness.

And it is men that already demonstrate godliness and the power of the truth to transform. They are the sort of men to appoint as leaders.

Remember that Paul's great concern was to see a thriving godly church on Crete. How on earth could the gospel possibly thrive in a place like Crete?

As we saw last week, it's a place rife with bad living. The island is full of liars, evil beasts, lazy gluttons, verse 12. It was not a promising place to plant a few churches.

[7 : 27] But we saw last week Paul's great confidence in the power of the truth to transform. He expected to see good godly living on Crete through the preaching of the truth.

That's how Crete was going to be transformed for the gospel through the preaching of the truth. And if the great need on Crete was proclamation of the truth, the truth which leads to godliness, then the question arises, who are the teachers?

Who are the ones who are going to be teaching this truth? What sort of men is Titus to appoint to the task? And that is his great job. Look at verse 5.

That is why Paul left Titus on Crete, so that he might put what remained into order and appoint elders in every town. Titus' main job, his priority number one, is to appoint teachers.

Now they're given various titles and names here. Elders, overseers, stewards. It's different names for the same thing, really. But in verse 9, the key task to be undertaken by these men is that of teaching.

[8 : 43] Just look down again at verse 9. He must hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught, so that he may be able to give instruction, sound doctrine, and also able to rebuke those who contradict this.

Paul's chief concern is to see churches established on Crete, which are marked by godly living. And that will only happen, only happen, through the teaching of the truth.

So which men is Titus going to appoint to the task of teaching? It's a vital question. It really does matter who does the teaching in the church.

So vital that in this short letter, Paul spends the whole first chapter on it. The whole first chapter is given over to this topic of who is Titus going to appoint to be teachers.

Those who teach determine the whole direction of the church. It is the priority for the Cretan church. It's the priority for us, too. Who are the teachers?

[9 : 52] It's Titus' primary task. I wonder, if we were writing this letter to Titus, what sorts of things would we include?

What things would we tell him to look for in the church leader? Here's a few things I came up with. Who you appoint must be well-educated. Preferably Oxford, maybe Edinburgh, St. Andrews.

They must have an engaging personality. They must be a compelling communicator. They must be witty. But none of those things find a place in Paul's list.

The key things for Paul are character and an unwavering commitment to the task. Titus is to look for men who are above reproach and who will hold tenaciously to the truth.

Those are the key things he's to look for. We'll look at these verses in two parts. First, the traits of the teacher. The traits of the teacher. In verses six to eight.

[10 : 52] And then second, we'll consider the task of the teacher. So first then, the traits of the teacher. They must be above reproach at home and in public.

The men that Titus is to appoint are not to be perfect or sinless. But they are to be above reproach. They're to be free from scandal. Mud can't stick. Such a man is to be blameless. In other words, he can't be open to accusation both in terms of his home life and his public life.

Let's look first at the domestic life that Paul has in view. A trustworthy teacher, if he's married, is to be the husband of one wife.

He's to be a one-woman man and to demonstrate faithfulness to her. Now, this doesn't exclude single men from church leadership at all.

[11 : 52] But if the man is married, this is what he is to be, faithful. He's to be faithful to his wife. Are you praying for your church leader and his wife in this regard?

How are you helping them to have a faithful and good marriage so that it's not damaged by their leadership through undue strains upon them? Are we praying for our church leaders in this regard? I've lost count of the number of things I've read recently about marriages of church leaders falling apart. It's just devastating. Families are devastated. Church families are blown apart. Are we taking our responsibility in helping our leaders in their marriage? He must be a one-woman man.

A man giving to flirting with other women is not a wise choice for a church leader. But all of us have a responsibility here. Ladies, don't make life difficult for the church leader by flirting with him.

[13 : 04] As older women, are you encouraging younger women to do that? To be wise with how they interact with church leaders? We all have a responsibility to behave wisely in this area.

His children are not to be wild or disobedient. Have they been brought up in the instruction of the laws?

The sort of man able to be a church leader is able to manage his home first and foremost. He is faithful to his wife and his children have been taught and are generally well behaved.

Not perfect. But family life matters for the church leader. And this doesn't really compute in our culture, does it?

We seek to draw a pretty firm line between what's private and what is public. I remember a few years ago when I was applying to study at the Corn Hill course next door.

[14 : 05] And I had to get a reference from my manager at work. And she could not believe that she had to answer a question about my marriage. What has that got to do with anything?

She just couldn't understand why it's relevant. But it could not be more relevant. Family life matters for the church leader. If a man is not leading his family towards Christ-likeness, then he's got no chance of doing that with the church.

But again, this isn't just for church leaders. This is something for the whole church. As members of a church, you have responsibility too. If a church is to have good and godly leadership, we all need to do our part helping the families of the leader.

That means encouraging their children, praying for them, helping them not to be wild and disobedient. It's not easy for the children of church leaders.

They need prayer and help too. So are we taking our responsibilities in this area seriously? Are we praying for our church leader and his family life?

[15 : 18] But it's not just the home life. It's public life too. Look again at verse 7. Not arrogant, quick-tempered, or drunkard, or violent, or greedy for gain, but hospitable, a lover of good, self-controlled, upright, holy, and disciplined.

Is this how other people see him? Is this how people see you?

Imagine your church was in the process of appointing a new leader, a new pastor. If you went into that man's workplace and asked his colleagues what sort of man he was, what would they say?

If you asked them about what they thought about him taking up responsibility and leading the church, would they be shocked? Or would they say, yeah, he'd be good at that.

Even though they may not fully appreciate what it involves, they know that he's a lover of good.

He's hospitable. He's an upright man. Above reproach in public and at home, these are the traits of leaders of the church.

[16 : 39] But they're also the traits that Paul is expected to see in all the church, not just in the leaders. He expects to see all the church living up to this, as we'll see as we go through the letter. He expects to see good living, behavior that befits the gospel.

And if that is to happen on the church on Crete, if it's to happen in Glasgow, then it must first be evidenced in those who lead the church.

The leaders must surely demonstrate that the truth does in fact lead to godliness. Above reproach at home and in public, that sort of man is to be trusted with the household of the church.

Such a man is a trustworthy teacher. That sort of man is to be listened to. But what about their task? The tasks of the teacher, they must hold firm to the truth.

That's what we see set out in the second half of verse 9. Two things. One, they are to instruct. And two, they are to rebuke.

[17:52] Instructing and rebuking. But instructing in what? What are they to instruct? And who are they to rebuke? What sort of things are they to contradict?

Is it some sort of free-for-all? You teach what you like, and you rebuke those who disagree with you. No, that's not the case. The key is there at the start of verse 9.

A church leader is to be a man who holds firm to the trustworthy word as it's been taught. It is, as we saw last week, the word taught by Paul.

It's through the preaching with which Paul had been entrusted by the command of God. It's not any odd truth. But it's the truth that has been passed down by the apostles.

That is the truth that the church leader is to hold firm to. And they're to hold firm no matter what, no matter which way the cultural winds are blowing, no matter how strong those winds may be, the church leader is to hold firm to the truth as taught by Paul.

[19:03] And that will be deeply unpopular. Just think for a moment about the debates around euthanasia, about abortion, about homosexuality.

To hold firm in those areas is going to bring scorn and mockery and a real temptation to just go with the flow.

Don't we feel that tug? Just to go with the way the cultural winds are going? I feel that. But hold firm. Tenaciously cling to what God has revealed.

That is the task of the teacher. Moral courage is required. That sort of man, that man who holds firm, no matter what, he will be able to instruct and rebuke.

That is what the church leaders to do. Now, I think it can be quite easy to focus on the first of those tasks. I guess most of us here wouldn't disagree too much that the task of the teacher is to teach and to teach sound doctrine.

[20:10] That's what we do is we meet together on Sundays and here on a Wednesday. It is as we saw last week that the truth, that's what transforms.

It leads to godliness. That must be our key task, driving home the implications of the truth. How it challenges our thinking, our results, our emotions, our motivations.

But there's a necessary coerty to the teaching of the truth and it's the rebuking of those who contradict the truth.

You see, Crete was the place where there was loads of false teaching, untruth being talked about in the church. And Paul knew that untruth would devastate the church.

Untruth does not lead to godliness. Untruth had to be challenged. And Titus was to choose men who would not only teach the truth but rebuke those who opposed it.

[21:13] And that rebuking will look very different depending on the error being dealt with and the nature of the church leader. Some will need direct dealing from the pulpits. Perhaps a popular Christian book needs to be tackled and critiqued.

Perhaps a quiet word in private is what is required. Instructing. And rebuking. These are the tasks of the church teacher.

They are the task because for the church on Crete to thrive, for the church in Glasgow to thrive, for this church to thrive, transformation comes only through the truth.

Godliness comes from hearing the truth. So who teaches in the church, who leads the church, is of vital and primary importance.

You and I need to pray for our leaders that they would increasingly demonstrate these traits, that they would tenaciously hold to the truth.

[22:20] faith. We must pray for those who lead the church. And you and I also need to pray that men like this would be growing up in the church who will one day be able to be appointed as men to lead the church in the next generation.

So what are you doing to encourage the next generation of leaders, the next generation of teachers? As an older Christian man, are you reading the Bible one-to-one with the younger Christian man?

Are you encouraging him in the faith? Why not take initiative there? Get alongside the younger man. Older ladies, are you getting alongside younger women?

Helping them to understand the role of the church leader. How they can help and support and pray for our church leaders. So as you think about the sorts of criteria for church leaders, let's not just automatically apply worldly criteria and standards.

you'll get the wrong man if you do that. Think in line of Titus chapter 1. Men who are above reproach. Men who demonstrate godliness.

[23 : 48] Men who will hold firm to the truth. No matter what. Let's pray. Amen. Father, we pray that increasingly you would be raising up men to lead your church who hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught.

Men able to give instruction in sound doctrine. Men able to rebuke those who contradict it. would you raise up men who are above reproach at home and in public and help all of us to pray for, to support, to encourage, to help those who lead our churches because the gospel is at stake.

The godliness, the salvation of many souls is at stake. So help us, we pray. In Jesus' name. Amen.