

The Character of an Elder

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[0 : 0 0] For there are many rebellious people, mere talkers and deceivers, especially those of the circumcision group.! They must be silenced because they are ruining whole households by teaching things they ought not to teach, and that for the sake of dishonest gain.

Even one of their own prophets has said, Cretans are always liars, evil brutes, lazy gluttons. This testimony is true. Therefore, rebuke them sharply so that they will be sound in the faith and will pay no attention to Jewish myths or to the commands of those who reject the truth.

To the pure, all things are pure. But to those who are corrupted and do not believe, nothing is pure. In fact, both their minds and consciences are corrupted.

They claim to know God, but by their actions they deny Him. They are detestable, disobedient, and unfit for doing anything good.

May the Lord meet us in His word tonight. Pastor Jason. Recently, there was a summit in Seattle about police reform, and it was a meeting hosted, or at least several police chiefs spoke at it.

[1 : 3 0] And the Seattle police chief said this in the middle of this summit or this forum on looking at how they can do better at policing. He said, No one hates bad cops more than good cops.

No one hates bad cops more than good cops. Bad cops give us all a bad name. The whole organization suffers. We have to be really critical and selective to make sure we're hiring the right folks and we're working hard at it.

And I think that's pretty much how every, hopefully, good pastor feels. That's how I feel. Nothing is really lower in my mind than a pastor who fleeces his sheep, who, for the sake of money, beats up, abuses, teaches falsely his sheep, who goes strutting around like he owns the place instead of it's the Lord's.

So, when you have teachers like Joel Osteen or others living in mansions, and their people are going broke.

Or Benny Hinn, and I just saw a documentary about him riding around in his Bentley, staying in \$20,000 a night hotel rooms, and sick people and old people go poor.

[2 : 5 9] But it's not just them. It's not just those people out there. That's always the danger that we find the problems with them. But it can also be just conservative, evangelical, even reformed pastors who are hard-hearted, demanding, fierce in the pulpit, preaching grace, and yet being graceless in their life, beating up the sheep, browbeating them, strutting around, playing politics, making power plays.

That's just common to leadership in the world. And unfortunately, it gets into the church. And so, what did Jesus call pastors like that? He called them thieves.

They steal what doesn't belong to them. He calls them killers, robbers, destroyers. Yahweh, the Lord, in the book of Jeremiah, comes to Jeremiah, and he has this message that he wants Jeremiah to preach to the leaders in Israel, in Judah.

He says, And so, what did that police chief say?

We have to be really critical and selective about who we hire. We want the right people in the right places. And that is exactly the situation in Crete.

[4 : 48] In verse 10, you see there are many rebellious people, mere talkers and deceivers. These are men that came forward, and they're talking.

They have something that they want to say, but they're just real deceivers. They aren't shepherds. They're just talkers. And so, what was part of the remedy that God gave to the situation in Crete?

Well, Paul says, Appoint elders in every town. These elders are designed to protect the sheep from these false shepherds, to protect God's people from all these talkers and deceivers.

And Paul is saying, Be critical then, and selective, about who you put into office. This is not a place where you want to make a mistake. And has anything changed from then till now?

The answer is no. It is the same today. And so now the Holy Spirit in the book of Titus says, Here are the kind of men that should be the overseers.

[5 : 52] These are the kind of men that you should follow and you should listen to. Here's the right man to put into office. We looked at this a week or two ago. He's a proven family leader.

He has proven leadership skills. He's actually shown that leadership skills in leading his family, in leading his children, in loving his wife. He's blameless.

And so people can look at his life and say, There are no obvious handles here. There's nothing in this man that people can consistently point to and say, Yeah, but he has this problem.

And again, this is his own self-evaluation. We can honestly think too highly of ourselves or we can honestly think too lowly of ourselves.

And so that's why it's important to have the church's feedback. This is blameless. Blamelessness is not about what I think. It's about what the congregation thinks of this man.

[6 : 52] And so now in verses 7 and 8, he's going to get to a list. Eleven things, five negatives, six positives, five things he can't be, six things he must be.

And then only in verse 9 does he talk about doctrinal position and ability to teach. Does a man know good to be able to teach if he does not have a life that will support that teaching, that is credible to that teaching.

And sadly, too often, people, because they can talk, are put in front. And they don't have the character that goes with being an elder. But here you see character is first.

Character is preeminent. Character is the things that must be. And character is essential. Now, before we get to these five negatives and six positives, I just want to see three very brief points of introduction as we look at this list.

We're just going to be looking at verses 7 and 8 today. But just three brief points of introduction. The first one is, it's not saying he has to be perfect at all of these things.

[8 : 07] There's been only one perfect man, only one perfect preacher, and it was the Lord Jesus Christ. There's only been one perfect overseer of our souls, and that's him. It's not saying that.

But it is saying, is this man blameless? Is he a worthy example? Can you point to this man and say, well, that's how it should be, or that's someone I can follow?

He doesn't have to be perfect, but he does have to be worth following. He's a good example of all of these areas. And so he just doesn't preach the gospel.

He just doesn't preach Christ and holiness from the pulpit. He preaches it in his life. And so when you go into his family, it honors Jesus. It preaches the gospel.

It preaches grace in his family, at work, wherever he is. Number two, you'll notice that all of these things are worth pursuing for all Christians.

[9 : 05] all of these things are worth pursuing for all of us. This is what the Christian life is supposed to look like. I mean, we could pull these things out and show, I could show you examples all over the New Testament where it speaks against these same things and speaks for these other things.

This is what, yeah, this is what a leader must be, but this is what we should all want to be. We don't want to be overbearing and arrogant and drunk and violent and quick-tempered.

We do want to love what is good and be self-controlled and upright and holy and disciplined and all the rest. And so as we go through this, I think the easiest thing I can imagine for you and as being, well, I'm not a pastor, is to say, well, then I don't need to think about this.

But as we go through this, don't just apply it to your leaders, apply it to yourself. I'm going to be giving a brief description of each of these things and I hope it will be useful for you to look at yourself and say, is this what I am?

Because this is what you're supposed to be. This is the goal for all of us. Three, before we get into this list, we've had it read.

[10 : 28] I've had it read three or four times now. And as we think of this, just, I want you to pause here at the beginning and give glory to God and give thanks to Jesus Christ that there are any men like this that are not overbearing, that are not quick-tempered, but hospitable, loving what is good, upright, holy, disciplined, that there are any men like this to choose from, that there are any men like this on all the earth is because of Jesus, because of his saving work, because of his saving grace.

He, and we've talked about this, he's the fruitful vine. And look at what he is producing. These are, these are real, ordinary men. We've, we talked about what Crete was like.

And yet, out of that stony, nasty, hard, backwater place, there's coming these men who have this sort of character. And why is that?

It's because of Jesus. So no one is born like this. Every pastor before he was a pastor was a wreck, was a ruin, was a rebel. That's what we were. That's what we all are.

But by the grace of God, the grace of God appeared and has brought salvation. Grace has taught men to say no. We're going to get to this in a week or so.

[11 : 56] But grace teaches us to say no to ungodliness and worldly passions. And live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in this present evil age.

Why are men like this at all? It's because of Jesus. And if that is true, what he did for these men, what he has done for every true pastor, he can do for you.

The same grace, the same Savior, the same power, the same Lord, there's only one Savior. There's not different grace for pastors and different grace for the other people.

I think one of the greatest things that ever helped me in my Christian life was when I was a younger Christian, I read a lot of biographies. and good Christian biographies.

And what that did for me was to say that this is possible. It's possible to live like this. Not because of anything in me or anything in them, but it's the same Lord.

[13 : 00] And if it was possible for this man, then it can be possible for me. So as we go through this list, don't just see characteristics out there. Don't miss Jesus.

He can do this in your life. Now with all that being said, let's look at what it means to be blameless. An elder, he cannot be five things, five negatives here in Titus.

First, he cannot be overbearing. It means arrogant. It literally means self-pleasing. So basically, he goes into a situation and what he is really out and what he does is he wants to please himself.

So he shows up in the room and he basically makes the room about him, about pleasing him. It's about getting his way.

And so you remember David and his run-in with Nabal. You can't be like Nabal if you want to be a pastor. So you remember David sends a message to Nabal.

[13 : 57] We've been protecting your sheep. We've been protecting your land. Can you just give us some food? And Nabal answers basically like, you're a nobody. You're a nobody from nowhere.

You're just a runaway servant. What am I going to make? Just bend over for you? Get out of here. David says, he hears the message. He says, strap on your swords, men.

And so 400 men are now marching towards Nabal's house because of his answer, his overbearing, arrogant answer. And you remember what saved Nabal's bacon that day.

It was his wife Abigail and she was smart. And so she ran out, got the food, met him on the way and is down on her face pleading with David.

And David relents. He just, I don't have to have my way here. And that's what we're talking about. This man cannot be a Nabal.

[14 : 56] He needs to be more of a David. He needs to be able to relent. It's not about getting his own way. It's not that I have to get my own way. I don't care what you think. It's unaccommodating.

He can't be unaccommodating, unyielding, inflexible, his way or the highway, dogmatic, as in dogmatic about things he doesn't need to be dogmatic about, impatient, won't take advice.

No, you remember Paul came to Jerusalem at the end of Acts. We've already talked about this and the elders came to him and they said, Paul, listen to us.

We think it's a good idea. You need to shave your head. You need to take a vow. You need to do what we say. And Paul says, fine. Fine, I'll do that. He could have kept his own counsel.

He could have said, no, I'm smart enough. I know what I'm doing. I don't need to do that. No, but Paul was an easygoing guy when it came to a lot of things. Remember he said, I become all things to all men in order to save some.

[16 : 00] That's what I mean. He's easygoing. He's not insisting on his rights. He's not insisting on what he thinks and then making sure that everyone does exactly what he thinks all the time.

No, he says that's fine. All things to all men. That was Paul. So he wasn't arrogant. He wasn't self-pleasing. Next, he can't be quick-tempered.

Quick-tempered. So what temperature does water boil at in Fahrenheit? 212 degrees. This man can't be sitting at 210 all the time.

Always angry. Always bitter. Complaining. Cantankerous. Easily angered. Keeping a long record of wrongs that he's just waiting to bring out.

He can't be easily angered. This elder is representing God. That's how Paul frames all of this. He says, as God's overseer or as God's steward, as an overseer entrusted with God's work.

[17 : 03] So he's representing God and God isn't easily angered. When you have an easily angered pastor, that gives the wrong picture of what God is like.

Should not be. He's slow to anger. And so, what has had, what's happened in this man? Well, the grace of God has so worked in his heart that now it's made him sweet.

It's made him gentle. It's made him compassionate. He's not on edge. He's not sitting at 210 always waiting to blow up and boil over. He has peace with man, men, and peace with God.

He's not given to drunkenness is the next thing. That's fairly self-explanatory. An elder must be filled with the spirit, not filled with wine or any other substance.

He has to have spirit-filled words, not slurred words, not confused words. Now, just talk very briefly about this.

[18 : 13] Does that mean he shouldn't drink any alcohol? Period. That's sort of the question. I think there's a couple of opinions that I respect and I think the whole Bible's whole teaching could support.

So, what should this man be? What should his relationship with alcohol be? Well, clearly, he can't be given to drunkenness. A more strict interpretation is from John MacArthur.

In his judgment, he says this, most elders in modern cultures have no justifiable reason for drinking any alcoholic beverages and putting themselves in the way of temptation.

They also have a responsibility even more than other believers to avoid exercising a Christian liberty that might somehow become a stumbling block to the weak. And I think what he's saying there is, yes, it might be a Christian liberty that you could do, but there's no reason that you need to.

And there might be some really good reasons that you might not want to, especially as a pastor. And I think that's a very mature way of thinking about this issue, especially for pastors.

[19 : 27] You know, when you're in a position of leadership, sometimes special rules have to apply to you or you apply them in a certain way. And so just parents don't, parents don't just say, I can do this, I can do this, but they're always asking, is this good for me to do?

Is it good for my children to see me doing this? Is this beneficial? And I think that's what John MacArthur is saying. As a pastor, you don't live on an island.

You're not all by yourself. You're not only responsible for yourself. You're responsible for other people. And so you need to consider them in all the choices that you make. Matthew Henry takes a more, a little less strict approach.

And he says this, the seasonable and moderate use of this, as in any good creatures of God, is not unlawful. Use a little wine for thy stomach and thine own infirmities, said Paul to Timothy, 1 Timothy 5.23.

But excess therein is shameful in all, especially in a minister. And I think both of those approaches are wise and good. Maybe you say, no completely, not because it's not your Christian liberty, not because it's a black and white sin, but because you have some real reasons that you don't want to.

[20 : 47] Or maybe you say, yes, but with seasonable and moderate use, always in control. Personally, I think both of those options are wise and good.

But whatever a man chooses, as an elder, he cannot be a drunkard. He can't be out of control in any of his bodily desires.

Not violent is next. And this word means more than just physical violence. It means violence in his words, too.

So you don't obviously want a pastor who hits people. But you also don't want someone who's argumentative, who hits people with their words, who's quarreling.

The Lord's servant must not quarrel. And so going around browbeating people, violent in your words, forcing them to do things, the anger of man does not bring about the righteous life that God desires.

[21 : 51] And a lot of browbeating is trying to bring about the righteous life that God desires, and it doesn't work. Not greedy for gain is the next thing.

Not pursuing dishonest gain. If you read the rest of the epistles, I mean, if you read the whole Bible, if you read the rest of Titus, false teachers do it for money.

Joel Osteen and Benny Hinn ain't the first, and they won't be the last from the beginning. It's always been about money, it's been about sex, and it's been about prestige.

And God's man has to be the exact opposite of that. He's a one-woman man. He's not doing it for money. And it's not about the prestige.

He is self-consciously, I'm God's man. It's not about me, it's about him. So I'm not doing this for my fame, I'm doing it for his fame. I'm not doing it for the money.

[22 : 55] Now, it's fine for a man to earn his living, but doing it for the money, to make more and more money, isn't what it's about.

So he can't be any of those things. Those five negatives. So what must he be? Well, he says, but rather, he must be hospitable.

And so we have this contrast. He can't be any of these, but he has to be these things. He can't be all about dishonest gain. Rather, he has to be hospitable.

And hospitable is almost the opposite of greedy for gain. So for this man, he isn't so attached to his house, his food, his possessions, that he's not willing to share it with others.

He's open-handed with his house and with all of his things. So he uses his house. He uses his car. He uses his money, not just for himself, not just for his immediate family, but for others.

[23 : 58] So he's hospitable. The Germans have a saying, the best for the guest. Is that what it means to be hospitable? Well, I'm not saying that it's not nice and good to treat guests honorably, but that's not really at the heart of hospitality, is not putting on a spread and putting on a feast.

It's treating people like family. That's what it means to be hospitable, that you welcome them into your home. It's giving them a place where they feel like they're home for five minutes, five hours, five days, five weeks.

I guess what I'm saying is hospitality doesn't begin with a nice house and a nice table. Those aren't the key ingredients. It begins here.

It begins with an open heart. It begins with a humble heart that makes people feel at home. You can have a perfect house and a closed heart and people won't feel at home.

And so you're inviting them not just into your house, but into your life, into your home. Jesus didn't have a place to lay his head. He didn't have a home.

[25 : 21] And yet, I think he was hospitable when people came to him. He didn't have a bed to offer them, but he gave them rest for their souls.

And so it starts here in the heart and then it works itself out through your house, through your table, through your kitchen, through your vehicle, through whatever God has given you. And Paul says that's what they must be, someone with a humble heart who that grace of God has now worked out into their life, into the way they use their things, into what God has given them.

Next, he has to be a lover of good. Good. That's such an abstract word. He has to love what is good. So, God is good.

God loves what is good. And you see, dude, this is a hard condition. When you love what is good, well, you love good people. You love good laws.

You love good character. You love good deeds. You love doing good. So you're not doing good. This man can't be doing good for some other end that he's going to get down the line.

[26 : 32] He's doing good because he actually loves the good. He loves telling the truth, not just because it's good business. He loves his wife, not for something that she's going to do for him.

It's, he loves what is good. They do good because they love it. Next is self-controlled or sober-minded. Sober-minded.

This is really talking about how this man thinks. How this man looks at reality. Does he see reality clearly? Does he see life from God's perspective?

This word, does he have good mental control? Does he have good emotional control? Does he have an accurate view of himself? Does he have an accurate view of others in the world?

Does he see life, like I said, from God's perspective? Paul repeats this term, this self-controlled, sober-minded term, five times in just this little book.

[27 : 34] Almost every group when he's going to talk about in chapter two about the older women and the older men and every group almost has this, they need to be sober-minded.

They need to be clear-thinking. The godly life is sober-minded. It doesn't mean dour. It doesn't mean gloomy. It doesn't mean always and forever serious.

But it does mean clear-headed. And when the moment for seriousness arrives, he sees it and he's able to enter into it with seriousness. He's not in mental ditches.

He's not in emotional ditches. He's not reckless in his thinking. Some people are perfectly nice people, but they aren't clear thinkers.

They jump to conclusions. They don't see things clearly. And just the reality is when you're faced with some of the things that you're faced with in the ministry, you need to be able to keep your head.

[28 : 35] You need to be clear-headed. So the next three, they all go together. They're all talking about godliness. Godliness towards others.

Godliness towards God. Godliness directed at my own life. Godliness towards others. That's upright. So this man has to be living upright before men. Doing what is right.

And this includes all kinds of things. So whatever it means to love your neighbor as yourself and treating people fairly and giving them their due, that's what this is talking about.

So just in the Cretan context, we're talking about not stealing, not lying. So he's not stealing. He's paying his bills.

He's paying his taxes. He's giving people their due. He's a good, fair neighbor. The elder of the church should be one of the best neighbors. I trust him.

[29 : 35] It was a real honor when one of our neighbors came over and gave us the key to her house. That's saying, I can trust you. You have my best interest at heart. That's what this is talking about.

He's doing right towards people, towards employers, towards employees, towards whoever. And then he's godly toward God.

He's holy. What can explain this man? If there's this ribbon that's tying his whole life together, what is it?

And it's this. This man has a heart. He's living for God. He's put God at his right hand. And so wherever he goes, there's the Lord.

He has the fear of the Lord in him. He's holy. He's holy in his mind. Finally, he's godly in regard to himself.

[30 : 36] And so upright is being godly toward others. Holy is godliness, heart and life towards God. And discipline, that's what this is saying. Discipline means godly in one's own life, towards oneself.

So he has himself under control. He's living right in himself. And so he's taken up the reins of his life.

He's in control. He's not just letting the horse go wherever it wants. He's using, he's begun to control his strength, the strength of his life. And so he doesn't give himself over to whatever.

He's now using his spiritual muscles to rein himself in, to discipline his life, discipline his time, discipline his desires.

And so, and this is not just in theory, he is now really exercising that in his life. And so as you look at him, he's sober in his mind, and he's disciplined in his life.

[31 : 36] And, so he's holy. He's upright. He's disciplined. Now those are what, all the things that an elder must be, and those are all the things that we should all want to be.

And the elder has to be these things. Again, it's not enough that he wants the job. It's not enough that he feels that God is calling him. The character and the life have to be there, and the people have to say, you know what, he's not perfect, and he won't be perfect, but he is an example worth following.

I can follow him. And we need examples like that. Not just someone telling us what to do, but someone showing us what to do, and then how to do it.

We need good examples, people to emulate, people to follow, people to be able to sit down with, and we respect them, and we can ask them those practical questions about how do you do this, how do you live this Christian life.

And isn't that the case that many things, many things are better caught than taught. There's that saying. And a lot of the godliness we can catch as we look at it in other people.

[33 : 07] So, what do you do with all of this? I mean, I know how to apply it to myself.

I mean, I need to apply it. I need to look at myself and say, how am I measuring up? What do I need to do? What areas do I need to improve in? But I hope you can see that being an elder or the characteristics of an elder so far are things that you should want to be, that you should be growing in.

Godly character is for all of God's people. It's not just for the leaders. It's for all of God's people. And because of Jesus Christ, because we have the same Savior, there's not a Savior for pastors and a Savior for the people.

We have the same Savior. We have the same Holy Spirit. We have the same God, the Father. So, whatever an elder is, you can be.

You can be. I live on grace. I live on grace. And you have that same grace. So, maybe you need to take heart.

[34 : 23] Maybe you say, oh, I can never be that way. That's not true at all. You can be that way because of who Jesus is. So, take heart and then secondly, pray for us.

You know, pray for us. Pray for your pastors. That we don't lose our qualifications. We talked about this whenever, a week or two ago, but having a well-ordered family is what qualifies you.

You lose that and you aren't qualified anymore. But all of these 11 things, those are qualifications too.

And you can't have 10 out of 11. You can't have 9 out of 11. An A minus isn't good enough. You have to get them. You have to have them all. So, pray that we don't lose our qualifications.

It happens. Men start out. They start out. And they have everything they need.

[35 : 34] All the qualifications are there. And they fall. We have the same temptations. We have the same heartaches, the same doubts, the same fears, the same everything that you have.

And we are just men. It's so important for you to understand. We are just men. Men living on grace. And so pray for us. Pray that the Lord would hold us fast.

Pray that He would keep us safe from the evil one. If we're in an army, the pastors are sort of like the captains. They have the feathers in their cap or they have the special whatever.

They stick out. And it's a long time honored war tradition that you go for those guys. You kill those guys. And if you kill them, you strike the shepherd, the sheep will scatter.

And so we are at war. He wants to ruin this church. He wants to ruin you. He wants to devour sheep.

[36 : 41] And the best way to do that sometimes is to get the shepherd out of the way. And so pray for us, for our spiritual protection, and pray that Jesus would keep us and hold us all the way to the end.

If this is a marathon, we don't want to go 20 miles and then run off the course. And we don't want to go 23 miles or 25 miles. We want to go 26.2 miles.

We want to go the whole way all the way to the end and then receive the crown of glory that God has reserved for men, for elders. So pray for us.

And if you don't know how to pray, put yourself into our shoes. Imagine how you would feel. Imagine the things that you would be thinking and how you would be tempted. And we're the same way.

So pray for us. Pray for us. Let's pray. Amen. Lord, we thank you that you've given us these instructions. Thank you for giving us these good instructions.

[37 : 49] All of your laws are good and right. They give us light. And walking in them, we do not stumble. So please help us to walk in these things as a church.

Help Pastor John and myself to walk in these things that we would be faithful shepherds. Keep us from the evil one. His devices are many.

He is ancient and smarter far than we are. So please, Lord Jesus, keep us and hold us for that day.

You said you would build your church and the gates of hell would not stand against you. So please continue to do that. Help us all to grow in these characteristics.

This is what we want to be. We want to have genuine Christian lives. We want lives of holiness and goodness. And not just for ministers, but for all of us.

[38 : 51] That we would reflect Jesus Christ and his glory. So, Father, pour out the Spirit upon us. Fill us and use us.

Help us to be holy men and women. Amen. And we pray this all for Jesus' sake. Amen. Amen. Well, let's...