

Establishing Leadership, Exposing Nonsense

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[0 : 00] Well, this evening, I'd like us to turn back to Titus chapter 1, and let's read again verses 7 to 9.

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, 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 in sound doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict it. So, we're continuing our short study in the letter of Paul to Titus.

Titus was a pastor on the island of Crete, and Paul wrote to him to give instructions to him as he led the church there. And we are calling our series, Because We Believe.

And that title arises from two crucial emphases that we always need to keep in balance as we follow Jesus. On the one hand, we need to think about what we believe and why we believe it.

[1 : 16] But on the other hand, we also want to think about the impact that that should have on our day-to-day lives. So, in other words, as Christians, we believe the gospel, and because we believe, then we want it to shape the whole of our lives.

And that's one of the big themes in Titus that comes up again and again. The fact that our day-to-day lives as individuals and as a church family together, it's to be shaped by the truth that we've come to know and believe.

And it's all reminding us that in our walk as Christians, in healthy discipleship, there's always assurance and action, convictions and consequences, doctrine and duty.

What we know and believe in our hearts must shape the way that we live our lives. So, because of what we believe, and because we believe it, we want to devote ourselves to the good patterns of behaviour that God wants to see in our lives.

And it's so important that we get it the right way round. We are not doing good works in order to be saved. That's legalism. It's not the gospel.

[2 : 29] We do good works in our lives because we believe. And this is such an important and relevant thing for us to think about.

Because if you think about the week ahead, you will do what you do because of what you believe. And that applies in every part of life.

So, maybe you'll spend a lot of time with your family this week. Why do you do that? You do that because you believe that your family is incredibly important. You might exercise this week.

Why will you do that? You do that because you believe it's good for you and important in order to stay healthy. You might work your socks off at school or at work because you believe that you need to work hard in order to succeed.

And maybe you might volunteer with a charity or you might help somebody in need. You might visit somebody. You might give to a good cause. You do that because you believe that people need help.

[3 : 26] All of that's so good. But it's just highlighting the fact that what we believe shapes the way we live. And it's also true that this can fuel very good things in our lives. But it can also lie behind things in our lives that are not so good.

So, maybe you haven't bothered very much at school or at work because you just believe it's a waste of time. Or maybe you spend a huge amount of time on how you look and how you appear because you believe that you're going to be judged by others depending on how attractive you are or not.

Or maybe you've thought a lot about money over the past week and you do that because you believe it's going to make you happy. All of these are examples of the fact that what we do is shaped by what we believe.

And our desire as we go into this series is that as we go into a new week together, we want our lives to be lived in a way so that people can look at us.

They can see beautiful fruit in their lives as Christians and they can say they are doing that because they believe in Jesus. And so that's the pattern that we're trying to learn as we go through Titus together.

[4 : 42] And lots of very practical areas of life are discussed in this letter. And we're going to look at some of them tonight. And we're going to focus on verses 4 to 16. And our title is Establishing Leadership, Exposing Nonsense.

And that title captures what Paul is doing in this chapter. There's new congregations in the towns in Crete and they need leadership.

And so you see that in verse 5, Paul says, 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 needs to appoint elders.

They need to establish leadership. But at the same time, there are false teachers who are spreading nonsense. Verse 10 and 11, There are many who are insubordinate, empty talkers and deceivers, especially those of the circumcision party.

They must be silenced since they're upsetting whole families by teaching for shameful gain what they ought not to teach. These false teachers need to be exposed and challenged.

[5 : 50] So our title is very much capturing the two things that are being emphasized in this chapter. It's very relevant to the church in Crete, but it's also very relevant to our own lives.

And the reason that this is so relevant for us is because we have to recognize that all too often, all too often we evade leadership and we entertain nonsense.

We evade leadership, we entertain nonsense. That can happen in families, it can happen at work, it can happen in our community and it can definitely happen in church.

There's so many ways in which it's easy to evade leadership. And you especially see that today people want to avoid responsibility. So we live in a culture where there's a huge fear of blame and people don't want to be the one on whose desk a decision might land.

And so we want to deflect responsibility. We want to avoid being the one who may have to carry the can for something that's happened. And so people try to avoid taking responsibility in situations.

[6 : 58] People try to avoid accountability. And all of that is a way of evading leadership. It happens in a positive way as well, though, in the sense that we want to please people.

We want to come across well and we want people to think a lot of us. But if we are just going around our daily lives at work or at home trying to please people, that's not leading. That's being led. Because we're just trying to keep up with whatever desires the people around us are expecting. And in other ways you see people, you know, they might seem like very strong leaders, but actually they want control. They want to micromanage. They want things to be their way or no way.

And that's not leadership either. That's dominating people. And that's excessive control. So there's lots of ways in which it's very, very easy to evade leadership.

But it's also very easy to entertain nonsense. And, I mean, that maybe sounds a wee bit harsh, but I think it's definitely true. So you see that it's lots of examples in life where it's very easy to believe nonsense.

[8 : 05] So you see that in the prejudices that people will hold, whether consciously or maybe even slightly subconsciously. Now, they might be racial prejudices.

And you see that in many parts of the world still today. Sometimes it might be social prejudices where, you know, people, you know, you see like class sort of prejudices among people.

Either those who are well off looking down on those who are poorer or the other way around.

Economics in terms of who's got this job, who's got this salary, who's got the next thing. Or educational, where some people might think, well, you know, they feel a prejudice towards those who either don't have an equivalent education or who maybe have a far superior sounding education.

You see it everywhere. We believe nonsense. We also decide nonsense.

Very often in my life, you hear something about someone or a situation and you jump to a conclusion. And all too often it's wrong. And yet it can happen so easily.

[9 : 14] We leap to judgments that are actually not wise at all. We can hold grudges. We can just see ourselves through the lens of being a victim.

We can draw a line against people who hurt us and we make a decision that is actually ridiculous. And yet it can have huge influence on our lives. So we can believe nonsense. We can decide nonsense.

And we can also chase nonsense. And that happens in loads of ways when we think that money or clothes or good looks are going to make us happy. We might get sucked in by something on social media or on TV or whatever that is unwise and unhealthy.

Or we can run for a quick fix when we feel down or insecure, whether that's food or alcohol or pornography or gossip or bitterness or revenge. We can easily chase after these things.

And these are all ways in which we entertain nonsense. These are very easy taps to fall into.

Evading leadership, entertaining nonsense. I've made both of those mistakes many, many times.

[10 : 23] Paul, in this letter, is pointing us in a different direction. He is talking about establishing leadership. And he's talking about exposing nonsense.

And very relevant, very helpful things for us to think through together. So thinking about establishing leadership, first of all. And the church in Crete gives us just a beautiful insight into some of the key building blocks that are needed in a church.

So the gospel has reached this Greek island. People have come to faith. Churches have been planted. And at the one level, the church is staying connected to the mainland.

And you see that evidenced by the letter that Paul is writing. So there's the connection to the wider church. But at the very same time, there needs to be local leadership put in place. And that's what Paul highlights in verse 5.

And this is all pointing us towards the pattern of church growth that's been seen again and again over the centuries. Where a church is planted. And that church then grows.

[11 : 27] And that church then goes and plants other churches. And the church multiplies and spreads. And that's the pattern that you see in the New Testament. That was what Crete needed.

That's what the whole of the known world at that time needed. It's what Scotland needs today. And the amazing thing is that it's happening. There are churches being planted. And these churches are growing.

And they're planting more churches. And what we see in Crete is what we're seeing in Scotland.

And it's immensely encouraging that churches are being placed in new communities.

But as that happens, it's so important that there are clear leadership structures put in place in the church. And this passage is reminding us that in the Christian church, leadership is entrusted to elders.

Now, just a wee important thing to note in terms of the language here. This is an example where in that word there you have the Greek word presbyteros.

[12 : 27] Presbyteros. Which is where we get the word presbyter and presbytery and presbyterian. Which just means elder.

And so when we are a presbyterian church, and sometimes we forget what that word means. It just means that we're an elder-led church. An elder-erian church is the English equivalent.

But it doesn't sound, it's not so easy to say. So you've got the Greek word presbyteros there. Here you have another Greek word for overseer. That's the word episkopos.

And that's often translated the word bishop. Now some churches have seen these as two different roles. Where you have a bishop above the elders. But in the Presbyterian church that we're part of, these are regarded as equivalent roles.

And that Paul is using the two different words to describe the same office. That a presbyter, an elder, is an overseer, a bishop. It's all the same role.

[13 : 31] It's the word presbyteros is describing somebody who's mature and older in their faith.

And so they're able to lead. Episkopos is describing what they're meant to do. They're meant to watch over, to oversee the life of the flock. It's describing the same role.

So that's why we're called a Presbyterian church. And leadership is entrusted to elders. Paul then goes on to describe the qualifications and expectations of an elder.

And this is a massively important section in the New Testament. Because this is describing what God wants elders to look like in the church.

And this is a section that for everybody in here who is an elder. It's a hard passage to read in some ways because you read it and you feel like you're failing in so many ways.

[14:40] But yet at the same time, it's a beautiful passage because it's reminding us of the way God wants leadership to be. And in everything that I say here, I want to emphasize how thankful I am for the elders who serve in this congregation and for the amazing love that they have towards you and for the amazing support that they give me.

Let me go through the many, many things that are listed in terms of qualifications for eldership. First of all, we're told that an elder is to be above reproach.

And that's really conveying the idea that it can sometimes be used as a sort of legal term that they've not got stuff in their lives that could be held against them, that they could be accused of. And so they're taking up this role of eldership and it's not like you're like, oh, actually, there's this massive thing in their lives that you don't know about. It's actually they're just they're straight. They're consistent. They are they're above reproach. That doesn't mean that they are that you can never you're never allowed to question the leadership in the church. That's not what it's saying at all. But it's just saying that that it's somebody whose life is is not one that can be held full of accusation of behavior that's inappropriate.

[15:58] And you see that working out in lots of different ways. There's an emphasis on their home life. And so there's the husband of one life, one wife. And so that's guarding against polygamy.

But there's just that emphasis that God's plan for marriage is for one husband and one wife committed to that marriage, faithful and raising his children in the Lord to be believers as well.

And again, the big emphasis there is that if somebody is going to lead in the church, then you want their home life to be shaped by the gospel as well.

And it's not like they see their role in eldership as just like a job that they do. And then at home, they're completely different. But again, a bit like what we were saying this morning, that public at home, everything is just shaped by the gospel.

So not open to the charge of debauchery or insubordination. So debauchery is kind of a word describing like just reckless behavior, like just off the rails.

[17:09] We would maybe use the word like a lost cause, somebody who can't be charged with that kind of behavior of just being reckless, irresponsible. Insubordination is the idea of someone who's not willing to listen to anybody else, not willing to follow instructions.

And again, you know, this in many ways makes lots of sense in terms of what we want somebody in leadership to look like. Again, there's the emphasis on being above reproach.

Must not be arrogant, must not be quick tempered, must not be drunkard, must not be violent, must not be greedy for gain.

Lots of just immensely important must nots in there. And then there's the contrasting positive qualities. Hospitable, and it's just interesting to note here that the word, Greek word for hospitable is lover of strangers.

So it's really important that when we think of being hospitable, it's not just to the people you know already, but to others as well. And you can see how that's echoed in the next phrase.

[18:15] Lover of strangers, lover of good, drawn towards that which is good and pure. Self-controlled, again, so important. Upright, holy, disciplined.

Holding firm to the trustworthy word as taught. And also able to give instruction to others and able to rebuke those who are contradicting the gospel and leading people astray.

Now, a list like that can feel very daunting. And every person in leadership in the church reads that and feels like they fall short. But at the same time, isn't it brilliant that that's the qualities that God is looking for?

And I want you to notice three things. I want you to notice, first of all, that there is so much emphasis on character. And so nowhere does it say they need to be really clever.

They need to be really knowledgeable. They really need to be really eloquent. They need to be really confident. It doesn't say any of that. Because God's not looking for a massive skill set or an impressive reputation or remarkable ability.

[19:33] Instead, he's looking at our character, our heart. And at the same time, I also want you to see that all of this is very, very counter-cultural.

Have you ever seen a job description that looks like that? Of course not. That's not what people look for today. And yet, have you ever longed for these things in a boss? Of course you have. And the third thing I want you to see is that really all of this is simply to be like Jesus. And that's the great quality that we're aiming for, to be Christ-like. Now, all of these kind of lists are there to teach us, but they're also there to help us grow. And for every one of us here, it's no bad thing at all to look at that list together. Maybe tonight when you go home to ask yourselves, to ask one another, what am I stronger at? Which ones do I struggle with? And it's so important to remember that growth in all of these areas is always by grace.

[20 : 36] It's always with God's help that we can grow in these areas. But it's a wonderful reminder of the kind of qualities that God is looking for in the leadership in his church. That's the leadership that needs to be established.

That's the kind of shepherding and care that God is looking for in his church. None of it is flash. None of it is focused on ability or being impressive.

All of it is reflecting the beautiful character of Jesus himself. So Paul's telling Titus to establish leadership.

But he's also telling him to expose nonsense. And the qualities of good leadership stand in contrast to the nonsense of those who are opposing the gospel.

It speaks of them in these verses that there are those who contradict the sound doctrine of the gospel. There are many who are insubordinate, empty talkers, deceivers, especially those of the circumcision party.

[21 : 41] They must be silenced since they're upsetting whole families by teaching for shameful gain what they ought not to teach. One of the Cretans, a prophet of their own, said, Cretans are always liars, evil beasts, lazy gluttons.

This testimony is true. Therefore rebuke them sharply that they may be sound in the faith, not devoting themselves to myths and the commands of people who turn away from the truth.

I want you to see that there's actually two kinds of nonsense in that passage. There's nonsense in terms of what people say. Myths, empty talk, deceit, lies. And there's also nonsense in terms of how they behave.

So they're insubordinate. They're lazy. Paul quotes the Greek poet Epimenides from around 600 BC. And I think it's important to say he's not condemning everybody who ever comes from Crete in those words.

Instead, he's saying that the behavior of these false teachers is verifying what that poet had written all those years ago. And that's causing harm to families.

[22 : 44] You see that in verse 11. They're upsetting whole families by what they're doing. And so you've got that combination of believed nonsense and behavioral nonsense.

And it's hugely damaging. And it can happen easily. And it causes so much damage.

And this is one of the things where, you know, we're just a wee bit like this morning coming to a passage that is just in so many ways highlighting something that we have seen so many times in our lives.

It's that when there are people in the church who maybe lose sight of the gospel or who focus on the wrong thing in the gospel and who entertain some kind of nonsense that they then force onto other people.

It causes so much damage because it obscures the true gospel. And it can so easily leave people hurt.

[23 : 51] And it leaves people not wanting to be part of the church at all. And this is reminding us why it's so important that every part of our lives is shaped by the gospel.

And that's confirmed by two interesting points that arise in verses 15 and 16. In verse 15, Paul says, What's Paul saying there?

Well, basically what he's saying there is that nonsense, if we entertain it, is going to infect everything. So if we chase an idol, if we entertain a conspiracy, if we nurture a sin and allow it to grow, it's going to muck up our whole lives.

And so that can happen in loads of different ways. So if I gain popularity at school by being mocking and judgy and horrible to people, then I'm going to end up seeing everybody as a target that I can use to make myself look good.

If I am successful at work by being a bit deceitful or difficult, then my whole working life becomes a tangled web of lies.

[25 : 04] And if I come to church and just put on an outward show of being all holy and spiritual and impressive, then I'm going to be constantly pricked in my conscience, constantly looking over my shoulder, constantly seeing others as a threat and constantly feeling exhausted.

Because if we depart from the gospel, everything gets ruined. Instead, the purity that the gospel calls us to gives us a worldview that gives us just a healthy view of everything that we will encounter this week.

So we go to work, we go home, we go to the news. We can look at it all through the lens of the gospel. We can remember that God is in control. We can allow grace to shape our reactions to people.

And we can prioritize living out our lives in a way that pleases and honors God rather than following all the nonsense that lies around us. So verse 15 is telling us that nonsense infects everything. And then verse 16 is reinforcing the point that our whole series is trying to highlight. The fact that you had these false teachers. They professed to know God, made all sorts of great claims, but they denied him.

[26 : 14] By their works. And that's the key point. What they claimed was undermined by the way that they lived. And that's an important thing for us to think about.

It's maybe a harder thing for us to think about, but it's an important thing for us to think about. There are many people today who might profess to know God, but the way they live their lives says something different.

Now that might be true of an unbeliever. Somebody, you know, who is actually not a believer, but they kind of claim to believe. But really, they're miles away from the gospel. More importantly, this can happen to a genuine believer.

And so I think, you know, we've probably all gone through phases of our lives where this has happened. Where we are genuine believers. But our lifestyle, our attitudes, our priorities, our reactions are not shaped by the gospel.

And that can happen. It's happened to me. I'm sure it's happened to you. And the amazing thing is that, you know, God is just always calling us to come back to him.

[27 : 21] But the big point I want to highlight is that verse 16, that whole idea of what you profess being backed up by your works, that's not proved at church. It's proved at work.

At school. At home. How you spend your money. How you react to things going wrong. How you respond in the car when someone does something stupid in front of you.

How you respond when the ferry gets cancelled or the plane is late. Or whatever it might be. It's so, so easy. It's so easy to do this.

It's so important to think about it. Because we can undermine our witness as Christians so easily. With the kind of hypocrisy that claims that we know God. But actually our lives don't match up.

And do you know, when that happens. Two people notice. The haters of the church notice. People say, that's exactly the kind of hypocrisy that makes me not want to be a Christian.

[28 : 27] The haters of the church notice. And the head of the church notices. And Jesus says, that's not the way I want you to be.

And it's just so important for us to think about how, what this series is trying to teach us is just massive for our witness. That if we say we love Jesus, we want our lives to show that.

Now that's a huge challenge. And I'm sure I'm making everybody feel guilty. And I'm not trying to do that. And I don't want to do that. But it is just a really important thing for us to think about.

As we go into this week, we want to get up tomorrow morning saying, Lord Jesus, I love you. I want to follow you. Please, by your grace, help me to live out my life this week.

In a way that points to that. Now one other thing I also want to say about verse 16 is this. It's talking about people who've professed to know God but denied him by their works.

[29 : 29] I'm sure you can think of tons of people who've done that, that you've come across. But there's something else that I need to say that applies especially in the Isle of Lewis. Especially, well especially in Out Island, but included in that is Carlaway.

There are, there's the problem in the Christian church of people who profess to know Jesus but their lives don't back it up. We often, often, often, often, often have the opposite problem.

People who struggle to profess that they know the Lord. But they prove that they do by their lives.

And some of them are sitting in here tonight. And, you know, sometimes it can be hard to, to have the courage to profess that we love the Lord Jesus.

I can say for many of you in here, that when the day comes, when you do come to us and say, you know, I actually do love the Lord Jesus. We'll just say we've known that for donkeys here.

[30 : 43] Because we can see it in you. And I really hope that that encourages you to take that next step. As we conclude, the key point I want to highlight is that everything that we're saying is grounded on what we believe about God.

All of these instructions are because of what we believe. So we believe that God is a God of order. Therefore, we need leadership structures. He's a God of truth.

Therefore, false teaching needs to be challenged. He's the God of care and compassion. Therefore, a flock needs shepherding. He's a God of accountability. Therefore, we want to make sure that we are keeping one another focused on the Lord and following him.

In other words, God is absolutely a God of no nonsense. And everything that he expects in church leadership, everything he's looking for in the church family arises from his character.

God wants churches that are led well. God wants churches where people are cared for. God wants churches where mistakes, when mistakes are made, people are restored.

[31 : 48] God wants a church where if people are deviating from the truth, they are pulled back. God wants all of that because that reflects the God that we have and the love and the care that he has towards you.

And so it's important that in church, it's important, and this applies to all of us in church, we must not be scared to lead. And sometimes the path that we need to go in a church is not always the path that's popular.

It's not always the path that people will immediately want, and sometimes it can feel scary. But if we are following scripture, then that's the path we want to go down.

We must not be scared to lead. At the same time, we mustn't be scared to expose, not in a harsh, cruel, sort of judging kind of way, but in a gracious, loving way to help one another see if we're going astray.

And all of it is to be shaped with grace and mercy and love. All of this reminds us why it's so important for us to learn from scripture together each week.

[32 : 58] And all of it ultimately takes us back to Jesus. Because ultimately in the gospel, Jesus is exposing our nonsense. And he is leading us in the ways of his kingdom.

He's calling us all to follow him. And he does that because of what he believes. He believes that you are worth saving.

Amen.