

Final Prayer

Lord Jesus, may we always be prepared to confess our sin and accept its consequences, and thus show our faith and trust in You, who are always prepared to hear the cry of the repentant sinner. Save us and heal us we pray, O Lord; AMEN

Prayer

All praise be Yours, Living Lord; for You have a plan for the whole of Creation which has both a beginning and an end. While we live between the two, help us to enjoy the work You have given us to use, maintain and sustain the world. May we honour our important role in Your Creation, and be alert to the dangers of those who would destroy Your creation. We praise You, Living Lord, AMEN

Other Prayer Suggestions

Weekly Theme: Faithfulness

Without faithfulness, where would we be? It is an essential aspect to human life, and all true faithfulness comes from God. Pray that you might grow in faithfulness day by day.

On-going prayers

- Pray for people who do menial but important work for low pay
- Give thanks to God for the Sabbath and the importance of rest
- Pray for scientists whose work is to monitor the health of our planet

Meditation

Where, my Lord, are the tears we need to shed

For the lost, the unhappy and the unloved
Who endure the world today with no hope for tomorrow?

For those who have no voice in our complex world
Who suffer the indignity of being trampled upon by others?

For the people who do not know they have a loving Lord
Who have never heard that Jesus heals the broken-hearted?

For those who walk on past us every hour of every day
Who would rejoice to know eternal truth if someone told them?

For those who worship You but do not know Your love
Who have been sold a lie instead of taught a faith in Christ?

You wept for them, Dear Lord; may we then hear Your cry.

Bible Study - Titus 1:5-9

⁵ I left you behind in Crete for this reason, so that you should finish sorting out what was left to be done, and should appoint elders, city by city; as I directed you, ⁶ appoint whoever is blameless, the husband of one wife, one whose children believe and is not accused of reckless living or being undisciplined. ⁷ For it is important that one who has oversight (a bishop) should be beyond reproach as a steward of God, and not be self-centred, quick-tempered, a lover of alcohol, violent or seeking material gain; ⁸ but hospitable, a lover of what is good, self controlled, righteous, devout, and disciplined. ⁹ He must have a firm grasp of the word of faith according to what is taught, so that he may be able both to encourage people with sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict it.

Review

Immediately after the introduction to his letter, Paul went on to speak about the importance of appointing good leaders for the church. It appears that Paul left Titus on Crete at some point in one of their journeys in order to 'finish sorting out what was left to be done ...' (1:5) and one of those tasks was to 'appoint elders' in the cities or towns where a Christian community had been established. Paul continues by setting out the qualities of a person suitable for such office, and if we think that we have read this all somewhere before, then we have. Most of this can be found in 1 Timothy 3:1f., but with the characteristics all listed differently! Everything is complicated further because in 1 Timothy, Paul clearly speaks about these characteristics as being the qualities of an 'overseer' or 'bishop'. However, here in Titus, Paul begins by saying the same words about those appointed as elders, but half way through, he speaks of them as if writing about 'bishops'!

Church Offices! To our neat and tidy minds that long for rigour and correctness, the confusion is not helpful. Because the offices of elder (or from the Greek, 'presbyter') and bishop are regarded now as quite distinct, and different churches define them in different ways, there is much room for confusion! What scripture does however, is to humble us before the truth. Paul simply describes the general characteristics of people with the right characteristics to be leaders, and he says this against the background of a worldwide church growing organically, and changing day by day according to the movement of the Spirit. There were no formal offices agreed by universal or local church meeting, and the words 'elder' and 'bishop' were useful for what they added to the meaning of leadership; they did not define the roles, but the roles needed these convenient and appropriate Greek titles. For this reason, it is tragic when churches try to use 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1 to justify entrenched opinions about the definition of key church posts such as bishop, elder or deacon. In addition, if we fall into the trap of defining posts according to the original Greek meaning of the words, then we compound the misunderstanding. I emphasise that Paul used them as convenient descriptors of the greater role of the leadership of God's people, and the roles have always been far greater than the titles, as this text clearly shows.

Once we have come to terms with this discomfiting but essential and liberating truth, then we are in a position to read Titus 6-9 without becoming bothered about whether this is a description of elders or bishops. It ceases to matter where Paul's description changes from that of one to the other, or indeed, why he described elders in Titus using the same definitions he used for bishops in 1 Timothy! The truth is that if we focus on God's agenda of leadership, then we will find the truth of this text, but if we look to our own agenda of defining roles and status, then we will be disappointed.

Qualities of leadership It is in fact very important that what is said here in Titus is so remarkably similar to 1 Timothy 3:1-7. If you read the 1 Timothy passage, you will find that most of the words used here such as 'blameless', 'the husband of one wife', 'not self centred' etc. are found in 1 Timothy expressed slightly differently perhaps but articulated very similarly. It seems that Paul had a general list of qualities in his head for assessing good leaders, and when he needed to speak about this, he used them according to the circumstances. We all have patterns of words in our minds which describe certain things, and when people ask us about 'our health', or 'our families', for example, we tend to say roughly the same thing, but in different ways according to the situation. This, in my opinion, adds veracity to the whole text, both of Titus and 1 Timothy.

I could have spent the whole study going over the particular qualities of a Christian leader mentioned here, but it is important that we read this text in the right way so that the Spirit can speak to us. Paul clearly says that the essential qualities for leadership are uprightness and personal character in both public situations and the home, and most of the

details are obvious (once we stop trying to decide whether they apply to bishops or elders!). Much of what is said here repeats 1 Timothy, and you can access the notes on 1 Timothy to see what I have said about them there (or wait until I have written a full study of this text).

Special qualities The great challenge of what Paul says here in Titus, as opposed to 1 Timothy, arises in two comments. Firstly, he says that a leader should be able to demonstrate that his children are believers (1:6). This is a brief but difficult comment and I believe that Paul, if challenged about the wisdom of presenting this goal, might accept that he meant a leader should demonstrably bring his children up in the faith. I strongly doubt that Paul was trying to make a leader accountable for whether or not his children accept faith as they grow into adulthood. The second challenge comes in the last verse (1:9), where he emphasises that the leader 'must have a firm grasp of the word of faith ...'. You will find that this is expressed rather differently in other Bible translations, but this version makes it clear that a leader must not only read the Word and be a student of God's revelation, he must learn the skills to communicate it effectively ('so that he may be able both to encourage ... and refute'). Leaders of God's people have a duty to God and their congregations to be godly people who can communicate faith.

Questions *(for use in groups)*

1. To what extent does this list reflect how we define leadership roles in the church today?
2. Does this passage of scripture set a standard that is too high or too low? How would its application affect the leadership of the church today?
3. Should every church leader be a preacher? How can a church leader lead if they do not preach; is this possible?

Discipleship

Personal comment:

Having made an issue about how to read this passage rather than explain it in detail, I must say that what Paul says is not something to be avoided. In my opinion, the high standard should, be set and leaders should be made accountable to it. Too many bad leaders in our midst say that they are accountable to God alone, and avoid any other form of accountability. This is profoundly unhelpful, and means that many leaders who need to face their own inadequacies get by through covering them up. Unfortunately, the church often fails to interpret and use this text (and 1 Timothy) because it is scared that it cannot deal pastorally with the huge problems it would throw up. Frankly, I think this only shows the awful nature of the problem.

Ideas for discipleship programme

- *In humility, pray for your own leaders, and if you are a church leader, pray for those set over you in the church. Let the Lord show you how to respond to this text, rather than allow your initial response to the reading determine how you feel about it.*
- *Talk with others in the church, whenever possible, about the issue of accountability in leadership within the church, and whether it is possible to help the church move forward in such matters.*