

# OpenTheo

## Qualifications of Christian Leaders - Part 1

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### **The Bible for Today with John Stott - Premier**

John Stott explains that the health of the local church depends on the quality of its leaders. He shows that pastoral leadership was always God's purpose, that it may take different forms and should consist of a team and not a single leader.

### **Transcript**

[music] Churches die from the top downwards. Join me at growing church and your chermi visionary leadership. It is leaders who make growth.

And where you have spiritual leaders, men and women of prayer, imaginative, alert, and intelligent, there you will find growth.

[music] Welcome to the Bible for today with John Stott. Whilst John Stott impacted the church across the world, his home church was always all souls, laying in place on the heart of London's West End.

And it's from 600 sermons he preached there that we're marking his centenary with some of his most powerful messages.

[music] John Stott was passionate about good church leadership. His great concern was to see leaders who were grounded in the scriptures and able to teach others to be the same.

It was a subject he often returned to, and today he sets out the important qualification of church leaders. So we begin this morning, this brief series of free expositions of the little letter of Paul to Titus, which conveniently in our Bibles is divided into three chapters. Perhaps you'd like to turn to the text, and we shall be referring to it.

Of course, a good deal during the exposition. Now I've given us a title to the three expositions, the words "the life of the local church." I hardly need to remind you that all the New Testament letters, without exception, were intended to regulate in some degree the life of the local church. It's doctrine, it's ethical standards, it's fellowship and unity, or

disunity, it's witness and service in the world, it's earthly pilgrimage and it's expectation of glory in the end.

And the local church is the apostle Paul's concern, even when he's writing to individuals, whether Titus or Timothy or Philemon, because he's always looking beyond those individuals to the church or the churches which they supervised. Now in our first chapter that we're considering today, prominent among the apostles' concerns for the local church was the question of local leadership. He knew very well, as I hope we do too, that the health of the local church depends on the quality of its leaders.

Let me quote from George Carret, he said, "Churches die when their leaders die. Churches die from the top downwards. Show me a growing church and your sirmy visionary leadership.

It is leaders who make growth. And where you have spiritual leaders, men and women of prayer, imaginative, alert and intelligent, there you will find growth." And I think he's right. The church does depend very largely on its leadership.

So this is the very first subject that he raises with his young lieutenant Titus. It concerns particularly, chapter 1, the selection and the appointment of church leaders, pastors, we would probably call them today. Now before we come to the essence of what Paul is writing, there are three introductory points about the pastoral oversight of the church, which I think we need to consider.

They won't take us very long. The first is this, the pastoral oversight of the church has been God's purpose from the beginning. God never intended his church, whether in the Old Testament or in the New, to be, quote, "sheep without a shepherd." The situation of sheep without a shepherd aroused the compassion of Jesus.

When he saw the crowds like shepherdless sheep, God never intended that to take place. Oh, I know there is a certain anti-clericalism in the church today of people who think that they can do without any kind of pastoral leadership, but they cannot be truly biblical, because the Bible makes it clear that God intended his people to have pastoral oversight. Sir Paul gives instructions here to Titus, as he has done also to Timothy, to select and to appoint appropriate pastoral leaders in the church.

That's the first thing. Secondly, the pastoral oversight of the church that God intends always may take different forms. No one pattern of leadership or government has been laid down clearly.

So the episcopal form, the Presbyterian form, the Congregational form can all be defended from Scripture. And for that reason, we ought not to separate from one another on this ground merely. It's not sufficiently serious to justify separation as a second thing.

And third is a pastoral oversight of the church, although it may take different forms, should always be plural. There should be a team in the pastoral oversight. The Christian brethren got that right years ago.

They've always talked from the beginning of the last century of the oversight, which is plural. So the one person ministry, you know, one pastor perched precariously at the apex of the pyramid is a totally unbiblical model of the church. When you think of one poor fellow up there, with all the laity and their sherry ranks of inferiority beneath him, there is a pyramid that we need to blow up or explode.

It's not biblical, like the one man banded, in which one musician plays all the instruments. That may be possible. Musically speaking, it's not possible, pastorally speaking.

So we find here, for example, in verse 5, that you should appoint elders in the plural in every town and every church on the island of Crete. So Paul and Barnabas on the first missionary journey, returning through Antioch Iconium Lister Derby. We read in Acts 14:23, they appointed elders plural in every church.

So we need to remember that today. Every local church needs a team ministry, a team of pastoral leaders who are both ordained and lay, both full time and part time, both salaried and voluntary, because I think it is in the team ministry that we can solve that difficult problem. And then there are people of different gifts and different specialities.

And the more varied and diversified the pastoral team is, the better. So maybe we could try to remember there's three introductory and I hope biblical points. Pastoral oversight of the church is God's purpose in the beginning.

It can take different forms, but it should always be plural and exercised by a team. Now with that introduction, we can come to the heart of Paul's message to Titus. It's on the qualifications of those who aspire to being a pastor or a presbyter or a leader, whatever you want to call them in the church.

The primary emphasis you'll notice in verses 6 and 7, because he repeats it, is that the pastoral leader should be blameless. Verse 6, the presbyter, the elder, should be blameless. Verse 7, the overseer, and the Greek, is episkopos, the bishop.

That's why we talk about presbyter bishops, because in those early days, the presbyter and the bishop were two names for the same office, all made certain. But in each case, the presbyter must be blameless, and the episkopos, the bishop must be blameless. Well, we must be very careful how we interpret that requirement.

To be blameless does not mean to be flawless. It does not mean to be faultless. If it did, then none of us, no child of Adam, would ever presume to offer for the sacred ministry.

None of us would be eligible if it meant flawless. Perfection awaits the perusea, the second coming. There's no perfection now in anybody, any sinner, even though redeemed and regenerated.

Perfection awaits the perusea. So Paul's requirement is not that candidates will be without blemish, but that they will be without blame. Now, the point there is that the Greek word means without a public charge or accusation.

The word recognizes that the postorate is a public office so that the candidate's public reputation has to be taken into account. Hence, the propriety of what in the Church of England is called the Sequest Declaration, so that before a candidate is ordained, he has to make a public declaration of his faith and so on. And then he gives a challenge to the congregation that if anybody can produce any reason why I should not lawfully be ordained, he or she is to say so.

That is biblical. It's a public challenge, a public request for the endorsement of a candidate for the ministry. Well, having seen what blamelessness means, we now investigate the three spheres in which the candidate for the postorate is to be without blame.

And the first is blameless in their marriage, assuming, of course, that they are married and in their home life, their family life. And their spies and children are both mentioned in verse 6. As for their spies, a candidate must be the husband of but one wife is the new international version. All must be married only once is the revised standard version.

Well, right from the beginning of the history of the Church, there's been a longstanding debate as to what that means and who it is the Paul is borrowing from the postorate by this expression. Is he referring to polygamists who have a number of wives simultaneously? Is he referring to those who have divorced and remarried? Or is he even referring to some of the ascetic Church fathers believed that he was referring even to those who had remarried after the death of their first spies? For myself as I've reflected, actually, for many years on this particular phrase, it seems to me unlikely that Paul was specifying any one of those options. It seems much more likely that he was making a broad and comprehensive statement that candidates with the sacred ministry must be entirely faithful to their one and only spies and that in the area of sex marriage and family, they must be blameless.

That seems a much more likely explanation when you broaden it in that way. Then he moves on from spies to children. Second part of their six, they have to be both believers and well-behaved, not open to the charge of being wild or disobedient.

The same word incidentally is used in the parable of the prodigal son, that he was wild and kicked over the traces. In other words, the best training ground for future pastors is their own home. It seems to be a very solemn thing that parents are held responsible for

the belief and the behavior of their young children.

And yet the logic is absolutely plain. Paul draws it out actually in his first letter to Timothy, rather than to Titus. He says, if anybody doesn't know how to manage his own family, how can he take care of God's family? He'd better look after his own before he presumes to look after God's.

Moreover, we can hardly expect such a person to win strangers to Christ if he has been a failure in winning his own family to Christ. So there is the first thing, blameless in his home life, marriage and home life. Secondly, candidates must be blameless in their character and conduct.

And in order to enforce this, the apostle selects no fewer than 11 words or expression. The first five are negative and the remaining six are positive. The negatives refer to vices that ought not to be present in candidates for the ministry and the remaining six refer to virtues which should be present in candidates for the ministry.

And the leading thought that covers all 11 of them occurs twice in verse 8. The third word in verse 8, according to the revised standard version at least, is that he must be master of himself. And then the sixth word in verse 8 is he, again in the RSV, is he must be self-controlled or disciplined. So self-mastery or self-control is the overriding quality that is to be looked at in church leaders.

Now do I need to remind you that self-control is the final fruit of the spirit. The fruit of the spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Same Greek word, and kretire is self-mastery.

So candidates for the pastorate must give some visible evidence in their character and conduct that they've been regenerated by the Holy Spirit and that their new birth has led them into a new life and that their fallen human passions have at least begun to be mastered and brought under control and that the fruit of the spirit has at least begun to ripen in their lives and not least in their self-mastery. Now Paul begins then with the vices, the negatives, that ought not to be present in the life of candidates for the ministry. Verse 7, "Since the press be to bear "ship is astured of the household of God, "he must be blameless in what way? "Well, not overbearing." Leaders often have a strong personality, but they've got to have their personality in check.

They must not be overbearing. They must not throw their weight about. They must not be arrogant or to critic.

Next, they must not be quick-tumpet. They have, of course, to serve many different people in the congregation, but they must never be impatient or irritable. However, exasperating, they may find members of their flock or however, exasperating, the flock may find their fastest, which is probably more frequent.

Not overbearing, not quick-tumpeet, not given to drunkenness, not having a tendency to drink too much, not violent, leading by example, rather than by the force of their personality, not riding roughshod over other people's sensitivities and sensibilities, and not pursuing dishonest gain, in other words, being motivated in the ministry by service of others and not greed for themselves. Five vices to be avoided. And these five negatives relate to five areas of strong temptation-- pride, temper, drink, power, and money.

Exposure to these five temptations is an occupational hazard for people in the public postorate. And all five challenge us to self-mastery. And the principle you see now is not that candidates cannot control the church if they can't control their family, but that they can't be expected to control the church if they haven't learned to control themselves.

Perfectly logical, again, is it not? So now we turn from the five vices to the six virtues, which are largely self-explanatory. A pastor must be hospitable, since pastors are expected to entertain visitors and strangers, as well as their own church members. One who loves what is good.

A pastor should be a person of large charity and a supporter of all good causes. Then we come to self-controlled yet again. And the great word here means both having a sensible and sober judgment, as well as a disciplined lifestyle.

Then upright, which here clearly refers to his dealings with other people, while the word holy means devout in his attitude to God. And disciplined, we have it yet again. Self-control.

It comes last in the list as it comes last in the fruit of the spirit, because it is inappropriate climax, and it covers everything that has gone before. Blameless in their marriage and home life, blameless in their character and conduct, and thirdly blameless in their doctrinal orthodox. They must say, much neglected today as a condition of eligibility to the pastorate.

With verse nine, the apostle moves on in regard to qualifications of the pastorate from the Herman family, from the individual character and conduct to the candidate's grasp of revealed truth. Pastors verse nine must hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been taught, or according to the teaching. That is the teaching of the apostles.

Well, you'll notice that the message, the logos, the word of God, is characterized there in two ways. First it is said to be reliable, the reliable word. And the message is trustworthy because it's true.

And it's true because it is the word of the living God who were told in the second verse of this chapter, "Never Lies." And since God never lies, he only tells the truth. And since the message is his word, we may be sure that it is reliable and trustworthy because it is true.

And then the second way that the message is described is literally according to the dedicate, according to the teaching that is consonant with the teaching of the apostles.

And the teaching of the apostles was already an identifiable body of instruction that is called interchangeably in the pastoral epistles, the teaching, the faith, the truth, the deposit. And this body of teaching has been bequeathed to last in its definitive form in the New Testament. - You've been listening to the first part of a message by John Stott on the qualifications of church leaders, which he'll conclude at the same time next week.

John Stott explains how to be a Bible teacher in a book he's written on the subject. It's called *The Challenge of Preaching* and it's our book recommendation for this week. It's produced by Langham Publishing and you'll find details on our centenary website by going to [premierChristianradio.com/JohnStott](http://premierChristianradio.com/JohnStott). (orchestral music) The legacy of John Stott lives on and is growing, touching every level of society across the world.

Today, Christian leaders throughout the majority world are being equipped to provide pasta training and resources in their own countries, thanks to the vision of John Stott, who donated all his book royalties to support this ministry through Langham Partnership. To find out about this and other ministries, John Stott founded, go to [premier.org.uk/JohnStott](http://premier.org.uk/JohnStott). Join us at the same time next week for more from *The Bible for Today* with John Stott. (orchestral music) (orchestral music) (orchestral music)

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