

Keynotes from Pastor Tim's am Sermon on 12/09/2021

Series: "Living godly lives in a godless culture"

Title: Part One - "Pastors, God's gift to the church!"

Text: Titus 1 verses 1-16

Scripture references from the ESV

Titus 1: 1-16 Paul, a servant^[a] 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 godliness, ² in hope of eternal life, which God, who never lies, promised before the ages began^[b] ³ and at the proper time manifested in his word^[c] through the preaching with which I have been entrusted by the command of God our Savior;⁴ To Titus, my true child in a common faith: Grace and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Savior.⁵ 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— ⁶ if anyone is above reproach, the husband of one wife,^[d] and his children are believers^[e] and not open to the charge of debauchery or insubordination. ⁷ For an overseer,^[f] 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, ⁸ but hospitable, a lover of good, self-controlled, upright, holy, and disciplined. ⁹ He must hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught, so that he may be able to give instruction in sound^[g] doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict it.¹⁰ For there are many who are insubordinate, empty talkers and deceivers, especially those of the circumcision party.^[h] ¹¹ They must be silenced, since they are upsetting whole families by teaching for shameful gain what they ought not to teach. ¹² One of the Cretans,^[i] a prophet of their own, said, "Cretans are always liars, evil beasts, lazy gluttons."^[j] ¹³ This testimony is true. Therefore rebuke them sharply, that they may be sound in the faith, ¹⁴ not devoting themselves to Jewish myths and the commands of people who turn away from the truth. ¹⁵ To the pure, all things are pure, but to the defiled and unbelieving, nothing is pure; but both their minds and their consciences are defiled. ¹⁶ They profess to know God, but they deny him by their works. They are detestable, disobedient, unfit for any good work.

What is the work of a pastor, and, more importantly, does it matter? What is the relevance of pastors and elders to the church and could we do without them? What difference do they make to our daily lives, as we engage in our normal daily tasks? Do they only work on Sundays? What do they do with the rest of the week?

This letter to Titus, which answers some of these questions, was written by Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to a man who was a pastor on the island of Crete. These days, we think of it as a great place for holidays, but pastoral ministry for Titus was hard. Some people on the island hated the truth about Jesus and were opposing Titus. They were:

- upsetting the people Titus had to care for
- teaching things that were wrong, as a means to get rich
- liars, evil beasts and gluttons (v12 above)

Titus was tasked with seeing these evil people changed so that they would lead godly, self-controlled lives in obedience to God's command, rather than the chaotic evil lives they were living. He had to challenge the culture and the way the church had embraced it.

From a human perspective, the spiritual state of these people depended on how well Titus fulfilled his calling. Of course, God was the primary worker in their lives but that doesn't take away from the reality that God uses people to carry out his purposes and what Titus had to do was of eternal importance.

Titus had the task of leading the church to live godly lives in a godless culture.

Pastoral ministry hasn't changed and it remains true that

the office of pastor (and elder) is of eternal importance for the sake of our souls

Elsewhere, Paul writes that **pastors are a gift to the church from Jesus Christ** for the sake of our godliness and enjoyment of God. However, neither the pastor nor the church decides what the pastor will do.

It is Jesus, the head of the church, who writes the pastor's job description.

This letter to Titus, together with the two letters Paul wrote to Timothy, is that job description, and shows us what pastors are to do, not just on Sunday but every day of the week. Crucially it also shows how we, as the church, are to respond to them, so that God is honoured in our lives through our obedience to him.

This letter, though written by Paul, is actually from our eternal Saviour and head of the church, the Lord Jesus Christ. It tells us how we are to work out church life in a culture that is lazy, pleasure loving, materialistic and hostile to the truth of the

Bible, so that our culture will see the difference that knowing Jesus makes. To start with, here are four aspects of pastoral ministry that are to affect church life.

1. The Pastor's authority (v1 – Paul a servant of God, and apostle of Jesus Christ)

The story of the Bible is the story of God and how he commits himself to a group of people, his elect, saving them from their sin through his own sacrifice on the cross, in order to give them eternal life with him. Throughout, God had his servants, known as prophets, who received from God messages that revealed who God was and how he expected people to respond to him. These servants obeyed what God told them, but also passed it on to his people.

Paul describes himself as one of those servants and **his message is to be regarded as coming from God.**

As an apostle, he received his message as a direct revelation from Jesus Christ for the church. He wasn't a self-appointed leader but one called by Christ to speak on behalf of Christ to the church of Christ. Today, as pastors follow what Paul wrote, they too are following the command of King Jesus. The chain of command works thus:

- King Jesus has commanded all that Paul writes (appoint elders, rebuke false teachers and instruct the church to live self-controlled lives – see passage above)
- Paul passes on this message and Titus must obey and teach this command, coming as it does from King Jesus
- Hence Titus shares Paul's authority as an apostle, and so the church must follow what Titus teaches

Still today as we read Paul's letter to Titus, this is the command of Christ, the head of the church, to us

Pastoral ministry is an authoritative ministry in the church, with authority coming down through Jesus, Paul, and Titus to pastors today. Jesus Christ, the head of the church with all authority in heaven and on earth, has given commands through his apostles and pastors have to obey and teach them with the expectation that we, the church, will bring our lives into line with them.

2. The Pastor's goal (v1 – for the sake of the faith of God's elect, and their knowledge of the truth, which accords with godliness)

If you have received that most precious gift of true saving faith, then you are united with Jesus and put right with God, leading to eternal life. Paul was concerned that the faith of God's elect should be real and strengthened. Any pastor following in this apostolic tradition is to be deeply concerned to ensure that:

- The church he cares for has true saving faith
- Their faith is growing and being lived out in obedience to Christ

Pastors are shepherds called to care for the souls of God's people.

They teach the church, not for the sake of imparting knowledge, but for the sake of the faith of God's elect. However, there is a link between faith, knowledge and conduct. In this letter, Paul instructs Titus to teach the church how they are to live. He wants to help him, and us, see how that change in conduct happens and how

- Lazy people become productive people in the church
- Evil people become godly people
- Liars become people who live out the truth that God speaks in his word

What links the pastor's teaching, the faith of God's people and their obedience?

Faith is birthed in us by God's Spirit as we hear God's word (**Romans 10:17** see p4).

When the Bible is preached, God

works through the word in our heart by his Spirit to create, sustain and grow faith.

That leads to a transformed life as our minds are renewed by the truth of the Bible (**Romans 12:2** see p4).

We are taught the Bible and we believe it and are changed by it

Pastors have this goal. They work hard at studying the Bible to understand it, so that they can teach it in a way that connects with the hearers. They do this so that faith is birthed and strengthened, and lives changed to become what Jesus commands. Faith and change are gifts of God's Spirit, and therefore pastors

- Work hard at praying for the people, and then pray over every sentence of scripture, pleading with God to give understanding, applying it first to their own lives and then to those who will hear it.

- Seek to bring Bible truth into every conversation so that faith is strengthened and lives changed
- Pray after every conversation that God would use their weak efforts to strengthen faith and change lives

If we want to know whether our faith is real, we must ask what am I believing and how am I being changed?

If we want to become more godly, we need to spend time growing in our knowledge of the truth of Christ and growing in believing that truth.

All of that is hard work and takes seven days a week, because pastors have sinful hearts that need to be brought in line with God's word before they can minister to people who also have sinful hearts. We are all reluctant to change.

3. The Pastor's motivation (v1-2 ... in hope of eternal life....)

Paul worked hard in prayer and the teaching of God's word for the sake of the faith that opens up eternal life that God has promised to everyone who believes in Jesus (**John 3:16** see p4). Though pastors need money to live on, and are to be honoured for the work they do, money and status are not to be the driving force in their lives. Instead, out of love for Jesus and his people, their motivation must come from **the desire to see themselves and the people they serve enjoying and glorifying Christ forever.**

4. The Pastor's method (vv1-3 ... through the preaching with which I have been entrusted....)

Christ commanded Paul to preach the word of God. As Paul obeyed this command, so God made known his promises (**v3**) and especially his promise of eternal life. In his wisdom, the Lord Jesus Christ has set apart some men to be preachers, gifting them for this work, so that the church he loves may:

- Know the truth of the gospel
- Have their faith strengthened
- Live godly lives

What do pastors do, and more particularly what do they do from Monday to Saturday?

They do all the things that the rest of us do, but in addition they are employed in a work of eternal significance.

They are servants, slaves even, of God, who take the message Christ gave to the apostles and work very hard to preach the gospel as if eternity depended on it – as indeed it does.

What does that mean for the church? Pray for your pastors and elders and pray with them as they study and pray.

- pray that God will lead them to what he wants the church to hear
- pray that they will be obedient to his word and faithful to teach it
- pray for the church
- pray that God will grant the gift of faith and repentance as the elders pray and minister his word to us

Then together we shall enjoy Christ forever

Romans 10:17 So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.

Romans 12:2 Do not be conformed to this world,^[c] but be transformed by the renewal of your mind,

John 3:16 “For God so loved the world,^[i] that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.